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JACOB ELTHORNE

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BROKEN ARCS. A Novel. 1911

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A VISION OF LIFE, and other poems.
1909

THE CRUCIBLES OF TIME, and other
poems. 1911

QUEEN TARA. A Tragedy. 1913

JACOB ELTHORNE

A CHRONICLE OF A LIFE

In Five Parts by
DARRELL FIGGIS

Author of "Broken Arcs," etc.



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TO THE MEMORY OF
EDWARD JOSEPH DEAN,
WHO WAS ALWAYS STRONG IN
COURAGE AND STRONG IN LOVE



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Jacob Elthorne

ACT I

SOME MEMORIES

I

THE LETTER

I was named Jacob, it seems, after my uncle. It is quite a good name, there is no fault about the name that I know, yet it was the bane of my life as a boy, with not a little of awkwardness attaching to it thereafter. I have never, it is true, been able to summon my soul to any overpowering admiration for the most notable wearer of that name. Nor can I think that his personality was so overpoweringly undesirable that all others whom an unkindly parentage have given to bear the name should thereby be compelled to find it a shirt of Nessus about their shoulders.

The selection of this fortuitous opprobrium is the more difficult to understand as neither of my parents seem to have been at all that kind of person. To a superficial observer my mother might have been the responsible agent. She may possibly have been so. But from my memory of her, that dear soul was quite a different sort of person. She had, it is true, a religious zeal of an absorbing order; or rather, not a religious zeal so much as an ecclesiastical activity, which is not quite the same thing: but this was the only outlet for an exuberant personality, where other and less harmless activities might have been turned to. Nevertheless, her Sabbath Day observance, her stoic attendance at innumerable services, her steadfast committal of the benefit of these to notes that were

never looked at after, her many and complete abstinences, were only superficial things, worn from without like a cloak. In herself she was bright, coquettish and affectionate, and the very last person in the world to choose for any son of hers so unromantic a name as Jacob.

As for my father, I have vivid, enticing memories of a tall, handsome man, full of vivacity and charm of manner, a little melancholy withal, but bursting out continually, like a gay brook, into an effervescence and irresponsibility that, I well remember, my brother and I used to look forward to like sea bathing. He certainly never chose the name Jacob for me; unless, that is to say, it was done in a splitting, irresistible freak of humour, for he was an inveterate practical joker. It is the more mysterious since neither of my parents could have been considered to be warm admirers of my Uncle Jacob. My father used to scoff his great, inimitable scoffs at him, and burlesque his mannerisms and family life in such a way as to keep my brother and myself in one continual giggle of merriment and admiration. At this my mother would break out a half-protesting "Michael!" and at once become convulsed with laughter. At the time, as boys, we had a dim suspicion that my mother secretly enjoyed my father's humour the more as she had had many earnest discussions on how best to circumvent the said Uncle Jacob's lean soul.

I have never been able to take my memories back beyond Saggart, a little place outside Dublin, between which two places my father used to journey twice daily by the aid of a toilsome and noxious steam-tram. Prior to Saggart I understand all four of us, my mother, father, and brother, used to live in London Suburbia. In London he had had charge of one of the departments in a certain well-known commercial house in the City, finally, with a great shout of joy, he being a Dublin man, to be drafted to the charge of the Dublin branch of the same house.

It was thus we came to Saggart, the four of us. Thinking backward I cannot pick up any event earlier than my ninth year; and there is more than whimsical irony in the one event that should stand out as it does, an oasis of memory in a desert of forgetfulness.

My father was one of those men who, while regarding all his letters as inviolate, would raid my mother's mail in quite an

indiscriminate fashion. Nor, if the letters were from England, had she any remedy. For there was never a mail from England delivered at the house when my father was not at home. Her only method of ensuring the privacy of her letters was by being astir first; and I imagine that in this way many a letter was unseen by my father. In fact, I rather more than imagine, for my mother was of a confiding nature, she was one who found it impossible to contain anything, and since by the nature of things she could not tell out her delight to my father, she would make cryptic confidences to my brother and myself, or to stout Maurya our domestic. But there was one matter where my father was never permitted to transgress, nor, which is a far more wonderful thing, did he ever to my knowledge attempt to transgress. That was when any letter came from my Aunt Mary. I believe that some time in the past there had been a pitched battle on the question. I know nothing of it, not even by rumour, but it is possible to read the past in the present, and I am quite convinced that no man would have stood as my father did on the hearthrug, inquisitively and persistently eyeing a solitary letter from my Aunt Mary lying on my mother's plate at the breakfast table, eyeing it with evident longing to know its contents, and yet doing no more than eyeing it, had it not been in his memory the sign and symbol of some episode in his past in which he had been worsted. As I say, I do not know what the episode was, but it must have lain between him and my Aunt Mary. She was a good deal younger than my mother, and a beautiful woman, while my father never fell out with beauty. Beauty and he, I am convinced, never disagreed, unless beauty was unkind, when it lost its title to its name, in his eyes.

It is out of this that my first memory arises. I was waiting for breakfast. Since then breakfast has had an odd habit of waiting for me, but in my boyhood apparently it was otherwise. My brother Frank and I were kicking our heels about the dining-room, or rather, I was kicking my heels and Frank was glowering out at the gay sunny day, when my father burst into the room rubbing his hands briskly together, as his manner was. The first thing his glance went over to, and alit on, was a solitary letter, lying beside my mother's plate, that Maurya had only a few minutes previously brought in.

At once he went over to it and gazed down at it ; but inasmuch as he never even handled it, we knew whence it had come.

"Emily!" His voice rang out through the open door.

A musical response floated up from the kitchen, where my mother was giving assistance with the preparation of the breakfast.

"Here is a letter from Mary."

Another musical reply entered the room, but with no representative to follow it. Nothing was ever able to withdraw my mother from the sacred charge of one of her experimental dishes—or one of our favourite dishes, for that was the same thing to her.

At this my father turned to the two letters that awaited him. One went straight into the fire. I assume it was a bill. The other was glanced at hastily and thrust into his breast pocket. Then the morning paper was requisitioned as in the ordinary course of events. But it did not seem to demand the customary absorption, for he would let it fall every few minutes, in order that his head might appear over the top of it for his glance to make a lightning travel over to the grey envelope lying on the white table-cloth. Then he frowned, and his eye sought the open doorway as though it wished to travel the passage down into the kitchen to discover the cause of this strange delay on my mother's part. His fine face could look particularly malign when he was vexed. Several times this happened, and each time he returned to his paper with more of determination and less of good temper. Each time his eye sought out the offending envelope his glance grew fiercer, his eyes shone more wildly, and each time they returned to the news columns he frowned more heavily in his attempt to confine his attention to them. At length he broke out.

"Emily!" There was indignation and expostulation in his tone.

The soft answer that floated back did not suffice to turn away his wrath, I remember.

"Do you know that I am waiting for my breakfast?" His tone implied that she did not. It was even obvious to my young mind that his concern was not primarily with his breakfast at all, though this might well have been an additional grievance. I myself was overpoweringly hungry.

When at last my mother appeared, followed by a dish-laden

Maurya, my father was near the limit of exasperation. But he confined his attention to his newspaper, seeming actually not to notice my mother as she took up the letter and opened it. Then as she read on, saying nothing, a dawning radiance thawed his anger, and he cried out almost gaily :

“ Well, what has Mary got to say for herself ? ”

My mother's reply at first was a brow she puckered at her letter. Then she spoke in the soft, reluctant voice she always adopted when she spoke of her sister with my father.

“ She wishes to know if it is convenient for us to have her here for—for a fortnight or so.” All the time she spoke her eyes kept to the letter.

“ I should say certainly—only too glad to have her.” The latter part of his reply was said as though it were meant, with a deliberate emphasis. Young though I was I know it always interested me, puzzled me indeed, to hear them speak together of my aunt. It was the only subject that I knew my father to be tentative upon. It was the only matter that occasioned him to relinquish the magnificent manner his presence gave him. I stood, I remember, by the half-opened French window that led to the tennis-lawn, puzzling at the address of him at that moment. Cleanly, athletically built, some six feet and more of stature, well formed and regular features, a fiercely twisted moustache, and with his hair trimmed close in military fashion, finely showing a well-shaped head, he made an excellent figure of a man. But now his ineffable distinction of manner, that was helped by, though independent of, his physical beauty, seemed damped by a halting diffidence. He was like a hawk checked in career by a suspicion of danger.

My mother was shorter than he by some six inches. Her face was full oval, and her habitual expression was one of extreme vivacity eager for affection. But I cannot speak in detail of my mother. She is to me too tender a memory for analysis. I know only that that morning she made a winsome picture. Clad in brown, with her brown eyes, brown hair, and a touch of brown in her complexion, she made a dream of brown when that colour is at its softest. The excellent soul doubtless thought it was puritanical ! Her eyes lifted from her letter as, after a brief while, she replied :

“ She and Jacob, I mean.”

“ Oh ! ” The introduction of my uncle's name dashed a

shade of annoyance over his face, and checked him. At the same time I gathered, as I looked at him, that the strange tentativeness that had marked him hitherto had also been swept away by the same agency. And so it happened in the event, for after a moment or two of obvious vexation, he rapped out: "Drat that man, Emily! Whatever made your sister take up with him passes my comprehension. He irritates me beyond measure." Swiftly then, and with no halt in his voice, he swept to an imitation of him. He minced over to my mother with an odd gait and with bent shoulders, saying: "Mary, my dear, I think I shall be able to snatch a few days' holiday next week; I really cannot be spared, but it must be managed somehow, if only to fit me up for the autumn's work. So it occurred to me—you know, as a passing thought—that it would be very nice to see dear Michael and Emily again. It is long since we have seen them, and we must keep in touch with our own. Eh, dear? Eh, dear?" With that he clawed my mother over the shoulder with a gesture that purported to be affection but was truly rather vulpine.

It was all admirable, and I fell into the large arm-chair in a veritable shriek of giggles. I had no memory of my uncle, and therefore could not have said how accurate the caricature was; but that it was inimitably funny was to say that it was done by my father.

My mother's response was the inevitable, half-protesting "Michael!" that broke its way out with difficulty from rippling laughter.

"Michael, you are too unkind to him," my mother proceeded to say, when her mirth had subsided and my father had resumed his magnificent stand before the fireplace.

"Fuh! unkind!" snorted my father. "It's impossible to be unkind to a Cræsus. Besides, men like that ought to be put in a box and under the good earth. They spoil the sunlight."

"But what shall I say?" my mother asked, extending the letter as though in expostulation.

"Oh, we'll have the sugar and hang the physic. Besides, we may get a little fun out of the physic: who knows? Anyway, ask 'em! Now boys, brekker! Step into your stirabout like men. Come on!—Ask 'em, anyhow, and

chance the ducks!—Who's going to be first through the stirabout?"

II

MY UNCLE JACOB

The house in which we lived at that time was ideal in all ways. It was no more than a big cottage, though it was obviously schemed for more pretentious dwellers. It lay back from the road, shielded in front by an enormous box hedge, on the right by a strong copse of firs, and on the left open to green fields. The situation and accompanying scheme were as deftly chosen and employed as a battle site by a crafty general. For the roadway came down from the right, having swept away from the farther main road on which the steam-trams coursed and snorted, and curled quickly away in front of the house. In fact, the house lay at the branch of the curve, continuing somewhat beyond. Thus from the windows it was impossible to see any roadway at all. The firs and box hedge shut it away to the right and in front. There it curled away, so that it was possible to see a far stretch of country away in the direction of Bray Head while at the same time enjoying a privacy that was almost a seclusion.

In this seclusion my father gloried. The copse of firs lay outside our garden fence, and continued past the back of the house, where, with the house itself, it framed an angle into which with difficulty, and at the cost of flower-beds, a tennis-lawn had been fitted, hidden thus from a perplexing, westering sun at such times as my father fought his evening fights. Such times, I may say, were frequent. Tennis was his summer absorption, and, I think, his winter melancholy. Nearly every day he returned from Dublin early and played till dusk would permit no more. Neighbours, cousins, friends and acquaintances were drawn upon to feed his lust: with whom

he regularly lost his temper, and regularly toasted in whisky in the end of all.

His two cousins were both of them men who lived near Dublin. One of them we never saw, save, that is to say, on very rare occasions. The other lived at Bray. Being a subordinate to my father in the business, it was he who was chiefly called upon to step into the breach when there were no others to provide the necessary game of tennis. He was no unwilling victim, to be sure. He and my father were continually quarrelling, quarrels that swept upon them with the suddenness of land squalls, and with similar intent to work irrevocable disaster too, it would seem, passing off, however, as swiftly as they came, leaving a half-apologetic perturbation in their train. They were very similar in personal appearance, my father deriving from his mother's side and my cousin from his father's. Indeed, they were generally taken for brothers, my cousin Basil being like a small and daintier edition of my father. Despite their quarrels, however, or perhaps because of them, they were frequent companions, being boon colleagues in mischief. He was unmarried, and lived at Bray, so that if he and my father kept talking together too late, and he felt disinclined for the ride home, he would put up in the spare room. When this happened my brother and I were mad with delight. My mother when calling us the following morning would inform us that Cousin Bas had stayed the night, and that we were free to proceed to wake him. Forthwith an avalanche of nakedness and nightclothes would precipitate itself along the passage to the little room at the end, there to fling open the door and plunge on to my cousin's bed, pummelling him right merrily to test the muscles that he boasted were like steel.

"Ah, would ye be leaving me alone now!" (I can hear his voice to this day, crying out as he lifted his head from beneath the clothes.) "Would ye now, with a man not yet had his beauty sleep at all!" And then, as we persisted in pummelling him, and laughing at his sleepy eyes, he would sweep us up in his arms and thrust us half-smothered to the bottom of the bed, where he would hold us down with his feet till we cried for mercy.

"Do ye promise not to be doing it again?" he would say down to us, putting his head beneath the clothes.

"Yes, yes," we would respond. "Not till the next time," when we had emerged to daylight, would we say in giggles, to be plunged down again with a :

"Then back again to the Black Hole of Calcutta till ye learn to respect your elders."

Then we would set to biting his toes : he would let out a yell and leap from the bed, crying : "Its murtherers you've set on me, Emily !" whereupon my mother's voice would be heard outside the door, saying :

"Now, boys, come out and get on with your dressing. And you, Basil, mind you're not late again for breakfast, or you'll miss your bacon."

At this my father's morning yawn would echo from his room beyond, and his great form in pyjamas would sail down the passage, and, taking one of us bodily under each arm, bear us down to the bathroom to go through our dumb-bell exercises under his direction, while he derided our puny arms.

All this, we knew, would be over so long as the anticipated Uncle Jacob remained in the house. Inasmuch as these gaieties were of far less frequent occurrence during the months of winter, it was therefore with more than a little foreboding that we looked forward to his visit. Having no memories of our life in London, his coming was, to Frank and myself, like the coming of a stranger of whom we had heard more ill than good, and whom therefore we had every reason to dislike. Even my aunt, who from all accounts had had a career of charm and conquest, was wrapt up in a mysterious unpleasantness, owing to the tacit avoidance of overmuch mention of her that seemed to prevail between my mother and my father.

Thus when the destined day arrived my brother and I awoke with rather chill forebodings. This may have been thrown over us as a kind of mantle from my father, for at the breakfast-table he seemed already as though he had assumed a defensive hostility, which he was first practising on us, the innocent, in order that he might become familiarised with it for the real issue ahead.

"What time do you think they will be here ? " he asked my mother. His head had been bent over his plate, and he lifted his eyes as he spoke, keeping his head in the same

position, looking at her as though she had done him some dire injury.

Flickering amusement played about my mother's diffidence as she made her reply.

"Well," she said, "they said they would have breakfast in town on their way up." She went through some calculations with her finger-tips on the table-cloth for awhile, with her brow ruffled in perplexity. "I should say that they would be here about ten or eleven. But what time will you be back?"

"Oh, I shall bring Bas up for a game."

"Not to-day?"

"But why not to-day?" In the manner of his putting this question the defensive hostility was very manifest.

"It will seem so discourteous."

"Oh well, I am not going to be put off my game for old——" He struck a slouching attitude over the table that was clearly an imitation of someone, and my mother quickly suppressed a quivering laugh.

"Michael, it would be better not to have asked them if you— Besides——" I did not miss her eyes as they took my brother and myself in a vivid glance, nor did I miss the implication that they carried to my father.

"I shall play the game, never fear! I am not a child, Emily, that I stand in need of reminder."

Irascibility on the one hand and expostulation on the other parted the rope of conversation between them, and no more was said on the subject.

The result of all this was that when finally the wheels of a car were heard crunching down the road, to stop opposite our gate, my brother and I fled upstairs in fear and dismay. From there, peeping through the open windows, we saw mother run down the path and excitedly hail my aunt.

Enquiries after her health and happiness, comments on her appearance, apparent health and maturing charms, joy at seeing her again, sorrow that she had not seen fit to bring her babe, with general exultations and solicitations, all flowed out in a torrent of emotional speech; and when at last she found time to turn to Uncle Jacob, whether because of emotional exhaustion, or whether, as I think, because of dignified defence, she was quite formal though sufficiently

cordial. My mother, like most warm-hearted people, had a reputation for gush, but her gush only followed her affection ; it was no fountain to be turned on at will for all and sundry. In fact, when she took a dislike she took it decidedly, and not all the arts of heaven or earth could conjure it away. Which is as much as to say that her gush might have been exaggeration, but it was certainly not insincerity. It was an emotional, not a social, commodity. It was a coin whose currency was rather in heaven than in hell or the earth between.

When at last we were hailed, and the hails became too many and too imperious to be safely neglected, we shuffled downstairs like a couple of culprits. In the hall we were greeted by Aunt Mary with an effusiveness that was obviously a younger sister to my mother's gush. I can only hope that the praise of us was merited. She went through the wearisome formula of declaring me to be my mother's son with a strong dash of my father, and my brother to be clearly his father's son with a lesser dash of his mother. Having exulted over us afresh on the strength of this discovery, she then passed us over for her husband's cordialities. He was far more aloof ; probably because we were to him a strange family. He kissed my brother, to his marked disapproval, but released me with the formality of a handshake.

It was some time before I could detach myself sufficiently to take stock of them. When I did so, with all the instinctive curiosity of a child, I found my aunt to be decidedly a beautiful woman. Her hazel eyes had a flash and fire in them that lent vivacity to her face. Her cheekbones inclined to be high, but the actual effect of this was to add a certain dignity to her features, and so raised to the rank of beauty a face that might otherwise have only been pretty. They bespoke a hardness of disposition, however. She was evidently one who could be on occasion bitter of tongue and vehement of manner, but she seemed to be making a continuous effort to control this in the direction of a hard dignity.

As for my uncle, the first thing that struck me with regard to him, and which I retain to this day vividly as my first impression of him, was his exquisite complexion and the extraordinary lustre of his dark eyes. The latter had a roving, restless quality that bespoke many things, one of them being an insatiable hunger for the sensation of living.

He was, like my aunt, of under middle stature, and lean of frame moreover. His mien was somewhat slouching and careless, making him to seem as though he stooped. He wore a beard, full and untrimmed, very glossy, and so dark as to seem black. It was not so thick, however, as to hide from view his very sensuous lips and mouth, or his stubborn chin.

It did not need a very mature perception to see that he had been attracted by the sensual beauty of my aunt, whereas she had been chiefly won by the fact that he was wealthy, and therefore a man who could provide her with all that the eye delighted in and the body desired. His attitude towards her was sentimental to the point of being maudlin, whereas she was to him almost cold and hard.

I suppose that I, from my corner of the hall, had been gazing somewhat raptly, not to say rudely, at him, for he exerted a spell on me that chafed me. At any rate, when my mother's glance fell on me, she asked me promptly if I was not glad to see my uncle and my dear aunt. I replied that I was. Whereupon, as though this were a preconcerted signal, my mother at once exclaimed: "Now you would like to come and see your room, wouldn't you?" leading the way upstairs.

III

MERELY A GUST

"Ah, Jacob, so glad to see you! How are you? Well, this is a pleasure! Had a good crossing?"

After all that had happened, I was amazed as I stood by and heard my father greet my uncle thus, bending over him with a courtly manner and a smile that had never been known to fail in its charm. I contrasted it with my mother's gush over my aunt and the kindly formality with uncle. It had been a genuine expression of her feelings. But my father had been kindly and formal with my aunt, towards whom I knew he inclined warmly, and he greeted my uncle in this way. We had

been seated on the lawn at afternoon tea, with the sun playing about us, when he had entered through the house.

My uncle glowed in response. "It's very kind of you, Michael. Yes, we had an excellent crossing, I am thankful to say. What a very charming situation you have here! That background of firs gives such a glowing richness to the house. And the lawn too!"

"Yes, it looks well, doesn't it? Ah, here is Bas!" he said as Cousin Basil came down from the house. "Let me introduce my Cousin Basil to you! I brought him down because he has been so interested in hearing of you from us, and had over and over again expressed a desire to meet you."

I distinctly saw Cousin Bas deliberately tread on my father's foot as he passed him to shake hands with my uncle. Both their faces were as straight and as sober as judges'.

"How are you, sir? Is this your first visit to Ireland?"

"Yes, it is. Lovely country!"

"Well, I'll leave you two together," my father broke in. "Kindred minds, you know, soon find a variety of subjects to talk about. First let me introduce you to my sister-in-law." My aunt, who had been watching my father closely, rose at this. When this formality was over, my father with indescribable dignity swept Cousin Bas back to my uncle, taking the seat beside Aunt Mary himself. "You'll find him, Jacob," he went on, as he sat himself, "a veritable fund of suggestive comment on the use of Art in the household."

My Uncle Jacob, I may say, was a wholesale manufacturer of wall-papers and chintzes, and so forth, for the house, that purported to exalt and ennoble living; and Cousin Bas, I knew, knew no more of Art than he did of oceanography. How the conversation went forward I could not say, for I was not near enough to hear, but Cousin Bas came of a stock that could be relied on to bear itself creditably in difficulty. Certainly if one could judge from his rather excited manner and his neglect of his tea, Uncle Jacob seemed to be delighted with the intelligent agreement and comment he evoked as he held forth his favourite theories.

Presently I saw Cousin Bas look suddenly and intently under my father's chair. A subdued gleam came into his eyes, though his face never for a moment gave over its aspect of grave attention. My father was sitting on one of those

green painted garden chairs, the seats of which are made of ribs of wood with regular spaces in between. As I looked in the direction of my cousin's glance I saw that one of the ribs on my father's chair had somehow shifted a little, with the result that through the wider space so caused a portion of my father's trousers, with naturally what that trouser held of skin and flesh, had bulged out. I saw my cousin negligently stretch out his leg till his foot lay on the ground immediately beneath my father's chair. All this while his head was bent forward, his chin on his collar and his brow furrowed as though in deep thought as he listened to Uncle Jacob giving forth his harangue with heightened colour and eager eyes. Then his glance travelled quickly round the company while he raised his foot and firmly pinched the protuberance.

With a roar my father leapt from his chair, scattering the tea-things right and left, and upsetting a small table.

"Michael, whatever is the matter?" anxiously asked my mother, all solicitation at this extraordinary and unlooked-for manœuvre.

"What the—? Who the——?" shouted my father, spinning round, and holding on to the hindermost portions of himself.

"Nothing the matter, I hope, Mike?" asked Cousin Bas, rising gravely and erectly as he put this question.

My father's face blazed with amazement and anger as he faced Cousin Bas, who regarded him with round, wild eyes of innocent query. It was a little terrific, yet it was inexpressibly funny. I had seen the whole manœuvre, and was now shrieking with laughter.

"You——" began my father. Then his anger swept round on me, and I received a cuff over the ear that sent me spinning into the laurel bush.

"But what was it, Michael?" said my mother, laying her hand anxiously on his arm.

"Nothing, Emily, nothing at all!" he said, in the short peremptory way he had. Then to Cousin Bas: "Look here, young man, what do you say to a game?"

"But you are sure you are all right?" Cousin Bas was clearly not content to let him down so easily.

"Don't be an ass! Go up and change your things. And you,

Jack, go along and get Maurya to clear up this mess, there's a good boy. Didn't hurt you, did I? Anyway, it served you right. Get along now."

"I'll have these things attended to," said my mother, as my father and Cousin Bas went off into the house.

Presently from within the house we heard my cousin giving out peal on peal of his high-pitched laughter. The bathroom window of the house faced on to the lawn, and from it we could hear my father's voice call out soon after :

"But, my dear chap, it has raised a huge weal."

An approaching voice then said : "Let's have a look at it."

"No, I'll be hanged if you do," came the reply. "Get out of it! No more of your larks!"

No reference was made to this intercepted fragment of conversation when both of them came down presently clad for their game, although when it had floated down to us my mother and my aunt had exchanged significant smiles with each other. With Uncle Jacob, however, the whole episode seemed to have been like a rain-storm to a gull. He had started up surprised at the amazing outset, only to wander off without a word among the bushes at the bottom of the garden. While I had picked myself up from out of the laurel bush, and caressed my ear, and endeavoured to bring Frank's to the same degree of redness for laughing at me, and received my mother's tender condolences and my aunt's would-be sympathetic mirth, and having considered myself a spartan hero for having resisted the inspiration to tears, and having eaten not less than three of the largest pastries in quick succession under cover of my mother's absence and my aunt's false sympathy—he had disappeared, and I could but see his bearded head between tree above and bush beneath against the farther fields. And later, when I had undertaken to scout the balls for Cousin Bas, in opposition to Frank, who had already received his usual delegation from father, in the intervals of duty I saw him examining the variegated petals of sweet-pea bloom, and smelling their perfume, with an expression that struck me as being quite curiously ecstatic. He amused me rather; he perplexed me even more; and he produced in me a strange feeling of fear at times, so that I could sympathise with my father's irritation with him.

But when two sets were over, and my father returned to the

ladies very well pleased with himself, having won both sets without the necessity of pushing either beyond ten games, I was considerably surprised to see Uncle Jacob return from his botanising at the bottom of the garden and proceed straight to father with the query :

“ I hope, Michael, that you feel very much better.”

What he had thought was the matter, I cannot to this moment imagine. From his manner one gathered that he seemed to consider that only the demands of courtesy could atone for the indelicacy of his query.

My father, who was in the act of drawing his chair beside Aunt Mary's, looked sharply over his shoulders at this question ; but there certainly was no hint of humour in the figure that stood so courteously beside him.

“ Oh yes, thank you, Jacob ! How very kind of you to enquire after me ! But I find these villainous attacks very distressing.”

“ Ah,” broke in Cousin Bas, “ but you should hear him, sir, when these afflictions come on him properly. Terrible ! terrible ! ”

But my uncle clearly did not propose to continue the subject. Moreover, mother's frown at Cousin Bas checked the foolery that was obviously in brew on the other side.

IV

I FIGHT MY FIRST FIGHT

That night when we had been dismissed unwillingly to bed, I undressed myself with unwonted alacrity, and, leaping into bed, cried gaily out to Frank :

“ Your turn to put out the light.”

Frank was shorter than myself, though more heavily built. His clear, sandy face suddenly reddened with rage as I made my remark, and he stood four-square, seeking to control himself as he spluttered out :

"It isn't; you know it isn't."

"Yes it is, and mind you make haste."

"It isn't, and you know it isn't."

"You *are* red."

Frank grew purple as he faced me. Then quickly flinging off his clothes he leapt into bed too, and, turning his back on me, drew the clothes over his ears.

This looked like a simple stalemate. Yet I felt as though thereby the issue had gone against me. For one thing, my brother had a quicker, more irascible temper than I, and, therefore, more of an overbearing mind. Moreover, he was the moral master of the situation: I had violated the rules of the game. Had I then got out of bed and done my duty, the moral situation would have been mine, for he would have been made to appear a churl. But these are not the sort of things either men or boys do. The fact that the moral issue had gone against me, touched me to something more, and less, than anger.

"Get up and put the light out," I cried out furiously.

"Put it out yourself!" came the reply, proving to me that the clothes over his ears did not prevent his hearing.

"Put it out!" There was no movement in the opposite bed. "Just the sort of mean, low thing you would do, isn't it?" Still there came no answer. "You who always go and curry up to father: scouting his balls."

"I didn't curry up. He asked me to do it." There was no movement in the bed. These words were merely deliberately uttered by a mouth that appeared over the bed-clothes.

"Yes, you did. You always do it." For a long time there was silence. "You know you do."

"Jacob!" The head merely turned over to permit the lips to spit this word at me, when the original position was stolidly and deliberately assumed.

Like a flail the word hit me. I sat up in my bed, furious, with the sudden resolve to let my fury pass beyond control. Then I threw the clothes off me and leapt from my bed to his, seizing him by the throat. The force of my leap carried me forward on to the floor beyond, and since I had had time to grip him by the neck he was dragged after me, each of us falling with a heavy thud. There we lay for a moment, glaring at each other, he with amazement, I with fury. Then

as his anger rose to match my incoherent rage, we clutched each other fiercely and rolled to and fro. The chair beside his bed was swept away and upset by our legs as they kicked and writhed to and fro in the effort to grip each other, or to avoid the grip. We dashed against the washstand, and I heard a tumbler fall to the ground with a loud crash.

How long this would have lasted I do not know, and what its result would have been it is impossible to divine, for we were both inchoate with fury. I was not easily roused to anger, and when it came, on the chance of an unconsidered occasion, it came with uncontrollable fury, till I almost revelled in it ; whereas Frank was naturally choleric. But my mother burst on to the scene. I remembered afterwards having, as on a far shore of the mind, heard her voice, as she came up the stairs, crying out : " Boys, boys ! " It had had no effect, and when she actually was in the room, even then we did not cease our furious wrestle. She had the utmost difficulty in separating us. " Boys ! boys !—Jacob ! Frankie ! whatever is the matter ? " she cried out, half in grief, yet all in anger. But we struggled on, gurgling angry sounds at each other.

At last, rather by dint of blows than by persuasion, she made us cease, and we stood facing one another, breathing heavily.

" Whatever was the cause of this disgraceful scene ? " she asked, standing between us.

Suddenly on the two of us shame swept. Yet we were obstinate. And between the pull of these two we were brought to a sullen silence.

" What was it ? "

Still a stubborn silence held us. For my part, I hung my head, fearing to look either at Frank or mother, and I suppose Frank did the same.

" What was it ? Tell me, Jacob ; you, as the elder ! "

Not a word came from me.

" What was it, Frank ? "

Still not a syllable.

" Very well, then, we must go into this to-morrow. Go to bed now, each of you, and don't let me hear a sound from either of you."

There are certain transgressions so out of the way of nature, that to punish them seems like an insult to the transgressor. It is as though there is something about them to which punish-

ment would be an impertinence. And indeed, with such manner of transgressions it would be true to say that punishment could have no other effect than to deep-grain the evil by ranking it as petty ; whereas the royal way of free acquittal would be to recognise the perversity, and so reduce the transgressor to a natural shame, purging and clarifying his emotion. At any rate I know that neither in my mind, Frank's, nor mother's was there ever at any time any thought of punishment. A certain cane that my mother always wielded, because father in his one use of it had nearly killed us, never came into any of our minds. Mother went downstairs, we went to our respective beds ; none of us was happy ; yet I think in each of us there was the strange feeling of an end gained. Prior to the scene it had always been possible ; having occurred its repetition seemed almost certainly and finally dismissed. One stroke of the cane, however, would have brought back that possibility, and almost made it a certainty.

No further reference was made to the subject till the following morning at breakfast. Then, in the midst of other conversation, father suddenly said :

" Well, boys, what was the cause of the trouble last night ? Eh ? "

At once confusion wrapt us. I felt Uncle Jacob's eye on me.

" Come on, what was it ? It's no use the two of you looking like that. Let's have it."

Father was a man of a fine, alert brain, and a quick sense for a situation. I felt from the way his eye came on me that he had divined the fact that, whatever the provocation, at least the attack had come from me.

" Well ? " he said, looking at me steadily.

I shifted under his gaze ; the table-cloth seemed suddenly to have come up unaccountably near my eyes. Moreover, it was wrapped about in strange vapours, like mists over snow-driven fields. Then I looked up at him, and his cold, clear eye steadied me. The memory of the wrong done me brought anger and indignation to my aid, and, I am sure, put defiance into my face and voice.

" He called me Jacob," I said.

There had been silence prior to my reply, but the silence

that followed upon it seemed to be as distinct and as different as a vacuum is from air. It had an extraordinary quality all its own. I felt it chill me, although I could no more understand it than I could appreciate the cause of it. But I saw father's eye almost guiltily seek my mother's, and then take a quick travel round the table.

How the conversation was resumed, or who resumed it, I do not know, save that it was resumed, and that neither of us ever heard anything of that fight thereafter, from mother or father.

All that day mother, Aunt Mary and Uncle Jacob were in Dublin. They set off early, immediately after breakfast, and did not intend to return till dinner. I suppose my mystifying remark at the breakfast-table was the cause that neither Frank nor myself were of the party. Or the cause may have been simpler by far; for I seemed to sense an atmosphere of antipathy towards children, or at least antipathy towards their too frequent presence, in Aunt Mary.

From what I had gathered at breakfast I thought father was to have joined them early in the afternoon. Consequently I was surprised to see him return later in the afternoon accompanied as usual by Cousin Bas. I was relieved too: as may have been expected, Frank and I were not much company for one another, and my eyes had become weary of reading even as my imagination had become weary of fighting against troops of redskins. So, immediately they emerged clad for tennis, I ran to greet them with a loud cry of:

"Cousin Bas!"

He punched me on the ribs, and then looking closely at me, said: "So you don't like to be called Jacob, eh?"

I hung my head, the spirit gone out of me. But it puzzled me to think what he should find strange in my repugnance.

"Well, you need not look so down about it. If anyone ever calls you Jacob, you punch his head. You are Jack, aren't you?"

"Here, drop that, Bas!" my father broke in. "We have had quite enough of that, God knows." And with that drew him off.

Later on, as they gulped hurried cups of tea between two sets, I heard Cousin Bas say to father:

"But what did the old buffer say when he heard it?"

" Say ? My Lord ! You could have cut the silence."

Cousin Bas went off into shrieks of his high laughter, then said : " But what did he look like ? "

" His eyes got like sharp points of light, and he just stared at the boy. I say, that chap has got the deuce of a lot of energy in him. I saw it in his eyes. That is why I cut out of it this afternoon."

" Why ? "

" Well, Emily can generally run me off my legs. She and Mary together, my dear chap ! Then throw in that restless old buffer. Phew ! "

" A man of your size ! " Cousin Bas looked over his cup at my father's splendid figure. There was contempt in his voice, but there was admiration in his eyes.

" Oh, strength isn't all. It's something more than strength is in that man. It's something that irritates me till I could knock him down. Why don't you rag him at dinner, Bas ? "

" Why don't you ? "

" After breakfast ? "

Cousin Bas went off into peals of laughter again.

V

OUR HOME IS BROKEN UP

It was one fine June day, some two years after this, that father came back from Dublin soon after midday. He wore a curious expression on his face. No sooner had he entered the house than he called out :

" Emily ! "

" Mother is in the vegetable garden," I said, going out to him. It was Wednesday, and a half-day at school with us.

" Run and tell her that I want her."

I ran. There was something in his manner, a subdued dignity, a perplexed exultation, that excited me considerably.

When mother appeared, he handed her a letter, saying simply : " What do you think of that, dear ? "

She read it once ; she read it twice ; and with each reading her face became more distressful. I looked at my father, and I noticed that a shade of annoyance passed over his face at seeing my mother's distress.

" Michael," she cried, " you're not thinking of accepting it ? "

" I don't see that I can do anything else. You seem to forget, Emily, that it's a rise for me. And an honour too ! "

" But we are very happy as we are."

" We can't stand still, can we ? "

" Why not ? If we are happy."

" You women are all so unreasonable." He spoke in peremptory irritation. " Of course we must better ourselves when and where we can. I should have thought that was obvious."

" But we won't be bettering ourselves."

" Of course we will." He stared at her a minute, divining her meaning. " I wish you wouldn't put contrary meanings on to all my words."

" But what shall we do with the boys ? "

" I had thought of that. They'll have to be put to school."

" Michael ! " There was pain in her voice and tears in her eyes. " Do you mean to say you will like that, Michael ? "

" Of course I won't. What is the use of asking useless questions ? But it will be best in the end."

" In what end, dear ? "

" Oh dear, oh dear ! " wearied irritation sang in his voice. Then catching sight of me standing by he ventured it on my head. " Now then, run along, Jack. Don't stand there listening to your elders. Go into the garden ! "

I went into the garden with a heavy sense of ill, and very miserable. Presently my mother came out there with red eyes, as though she had been weeping.

" What is it, mother ? " I asked, running up to her. Frank was with me by that time.

" Your father and I have to go to Ceylon, Jack," she said, caressing my forehead sadly. A bulbous blot of land that was falling off India into the ocean as a blot of ink falls off a new pen into the well, came before my eyes as she spoke.

"And us too?" I asked, my heart misgiving me.

"I am afraid not. You and Frank will have to go to boarding-school."

At this Frank started leaping about gaily. "I want to go to boarding-school," he cried. "That's just what I do want. All the other chaps go to boarding-school. I say, Jack, isn't it topping?"

His tone was infectious. It conveyed almost a feeling of jollity to me. It certainly won me over to him and away from my mother's obvious melancholy at the prospect. But when it came to the actual moving even the excitement of a change did not suffice to keep us from private, quite private, tear-droppings. Cousin Bas was in and out the whole time (he was, we understood, to take father's place in Dublin), and from him an infectious gaiety, if therewithal a spurious gaiety, was imported into the scene. But the man that came in to take stock of the furniture, the outlandish and strange furniture that was brought into the house and stacked with ours, all with lot numbers on them; the actual leaving of the house, when my father himself was not immune from the prevailing redness of eye and snuffling of nose; the night in a Dublin hotel; the journey over to London: all these live in my memory as melancholy landmarks never to be erased.

In London we went to stay with Uncle Jacob for awhile. There we were introduced to our cousins, one but newly arrived into the joy of life, and the other a boy of five. Father's irritation at being in the same house continually with Uncle Jacob was painful to see, and it needed all my mother's tact to keep him from flying into an open rage. For Uncle Jacob in his own house was by no means the docile person he had been two years previously in Saggart. He flew into intractable rages that even tried the patience of my mother, which is to say much indeed. She, in her desire for peace, even permitted father quite openly to be more than friendly with Aunt Mary, and this, I suspect, was frequently the cause of Uncle Jacob's rages. But Aunt Mary aided mother in her efforts for peace. It was masterly the way she did it. Uncle Jacob may have been overbearing with others, but he did not meet much success with her; and I saw, thus, the reason of her habitual aloofness of manner.

On one occasion, I remember, he professed to find the coffee

too cold after dinner. It was quite shameful to hear the brutal way he shouted at the maid. From the way he looked at him, I thought father, who sat nearest him, was about to strike him. His hand twitched on his knee as though it was without his power to control it. Aunt Mary, however, was before him. She rose stiffly, and going at once over to her husband, she took the cup from him, replacing it on the tray the maid held.

"We won't be having any coffee this evening, Bella. Collect up all the cups, will you? Emmy, Michael, let us go into the garden. The boys can come too."

Her manner was quite cold and unapproachable, although afterwards in the garden she was quite vivacious. Had it not been so, she could never have accomplished the manœuvre. As we went out, leaving Uncle Jacob in the room by himself, it was clear to see with whom the command lay, although I did not notice till long after what the effort for command was costing her in paleness of cheek and thinness of frame. It was wearing out her vitality not less than if she had actually been the conquered one.

Over one thing or another such rages were only too frequent, and both Frank and myself began to be quite in terror of our Uncle Jacob. It was necessary that peace should be maintained. Save for that necessity father, I know, would positively and physically have attacked Uncle Jacob over and over again. For we were to be committed to the keeping of Aunt Mary. Father was at that time discussing final details with the directors of the firm he was to represent in Colombo. Mother was not to follow him till October, thus to arrive in Ceylon at the height of the cold season, so as the more gently to work into the heat. When they were both gone the immediate and practical oversight of us two was to lie with Aunt Mary, to whose house we were to be invited for holidays. The more I think over it now the more amazing does the arrangement seem.

But at that time the only person who gave any earnest consideration to the question was mother. She bore us over London, buying us an adequate stock of clothes. She drew up lists of clothes for Aunt Mary to purchase for us when we had duly outgrown our present stock. On matters of clothing and health she drew out for us earnest counsel. She was full of advice as to how we were to comport ourselves

during holiday times at Uncle Jacob's : advice which I very much doubt if we even heard. Aunt Mary, too, was taken through the process, bearing it, it must be confessed, with very ill grace and much impatience. Poor, dear mother ! how her heart must have fluttered with concern at leaving us to the untenderness of others. And to what end was it all ? What a commentary on the commercial conception of getting-on !

It was so the days passed. Cousin Bas had come over and was staying at some or other hotel. He and father were continually at father's old business house, discussing the future conduct of the Irish branch of the business, which now lay in Cousin Basil's control ; or else father was with the directors of his new firm arranging details for Ceylon. Mother was fleeing hither and thither, agitatedly attending to our needs. Aunt Mary accompanied her, more for the sake of company than because of any interest in us. Henry, our little cousin (who was never, under any penalty, to be called Harry), accompanied us always when Aunt Mary came with us, but Frank and myself dismissed him as of an age beneath notice. As for Uncle Jacob, all these things seemed scarce ever to impinge on his intelligence. Sometimes they discovered him (he, be sure, never discovered them), when he would pour out an energetic theory on the relation of parents and children, children and parents, education and life, and schools and discipline, with flashing eye and red-flushed cheek, to my father, till the latter would look at him out of the side of his eye with such manifest malignity that I wondered how Uncle Jacob could possibly miss noting it.

" Yes, Jacob, bless you, man, I know all this," father would mutter irascibly. " And even not to know it would not, to be sure, leave a man much the poorer."

" There again I disagree with you, Michael. Of course I have my ideals and schemes, which others blame me for, but which I have steadfastly held all my life, and which become more to me now than ever they were ; but it does seem to me that we should be much concerned with the smaller influences of life, the little influences that pass into the alembic and are worked up into character."

" You mean education ? "

" In its wider connotation."

"I don't believe in education."

"Eh?"

"No, I don't! Believe it's all fiddlesticks." And with this, father's eye would gleam malignly, although there would not be lacking a suspicion of high-hearted humour with it all.

"But you are going to have Jack and Frank educated."

"Oh, that's Emily's notion. I'd like to send them out to a South American ranch. Ox-tongue business, you know."

"Ah, yes!"

"Or else slaying and killing!"

"Yes, but you see——"

"Good, honest, manly work!"

"But education is necessary——"

"Carcases! Well, shall we join the ladies?"

There could not have been conceived two persons who were less fitted to discuss together matters worth discussion. And yet they both had acute and penetrating minds. Neither of them had any basis of exact knowledge, although uncle had read a great deal more than had father. But they both had quick, keen, intuitive intelligences. Yet with them conversation always led to disaster. Father had the stronger, fiercer will of the two, and so Uncle Jacob was never able to rise to one of his rages with him; but Uncle Jacob had the more restive and insatiable an energy, which consequently compelled some admiration from father. Yet they could never meet.

Thus the day arrived at last when father had to leave for Ceylon. How I remembered the scene, and each detail of the day! He had elected to go by way of Brindisi, catching his boat at Port Said, and this enabled him to leave his journey till the night boat from Dover. Cousin Bas had not yet left to return to Dublin, and as he was to go down with us to Dover he came over to Hampstead, where Uncle Jacob had his house, for the final meal. It was really an extraordinary meal. Father and Cousin Bas kept their quips and cracks passing freely to and fro, and from us boys and Aunt Mary, in consequence of this, laughter was winging freely through the air. And yet I am convinced that the veriest stranger at that meal would have quickly discovered depths that were dark and tragic, trembling with tears.

Going down in the train it was the same. Frank bubbled

with merry laughter; I chuckled through tears; mother remonstrated with periodic ejaculations of "Michael!" but kept grave and stoical on the whole, notwithstanding; and father and Cousin Bas kept up the merriest foolery all the way. At every station they rushed madly about the platform asking the name of it from every porter. At one of the stations they pompously summoned the stationmaster, and when that said functionary had appeared carrying himself and an ungainly girth with incomparable dignity, they asked if it were or were not a fact that this train was going to Charing Cross. Fierce excitement at once seized this dignitary at the request, and he summoned his hirelings to get out the gentleman's baggage at once, as he was going in the wrong direction and the train was about to set off. When this had been done father courteously offered him a cigar with the casual information that his real destination was in fact Dover. A little more excited countermanding of the original order followed upon this, while father and Cousin Bas moved about with a dignity that defied reproach. Their gravity was impeccable.

On our arrival at Dover all gaiety was suddenly dismissed, and not only dismissed, but so as to take a strange quality of falsity in the dismissal. It so happened that the boat by which father was to proceed and the last train back to London left within so short a time of one another that it was impossible for either of us to see the other off. Yet since our departure was by some minutes the earlier, father came to the little platform, outside the station, at which our train stayed on its journey round the coast, instead of our going with him to the pier. I shall never forget that scene. Cousin Bas had withdrawn himself from the rest of us; Frank and I stood snivelling, watching our parents; mother and father stood close together, and, very rarely, spoke softly to one another. At last Cousin Bas drew his watch out and said, as though in reference of nothing:

"This train's late. And—what time does the boat go?"

"I mustn't be late," said father.

Then quickly he shook Cousin Bas by the hand, kissed Frank and myself, embraced mother several times rapidly in succession, and went off down the long, glooming station with rapid strides and shaking shoulders. Our little platform was

out beneath the stars beside the open mouth of the station, and we could see him stride down the ill-lit, long distance so. He did not look round ; I felt he dared not, or he would have thrown the whole business over, and stayed. His head was bent, his shoulders were shaking, and his magnificent height and presence were gone.

"Poor old Mike ! I knew he'd take it badly," said Cousin Bas. Mother was the coolest of us. As for myself, I had never somehow had much in common with father, but it seemed to me as though the sun were never going to shine ahead. Frank was more in possession of himself than I.

It was my first real bite of sorrow, and looking back on it now I can see that it showed me to be one more open to emotional devastation than most. To this moment the memory of our dismal journey back in the train harrows me. Frank slept heavily ; mother dozed fitfully ; Cousin Bas rolled himself in his coat, and either slept or thought with closed eyes, being rigid in either case ; but as for me, as we plunged through the night, or drew up painfully at every station, it seemed to me as though life had left me no incentive to make its continuance worth while, save the luxury of an immitigable melancholy ; that colour had been struck for ever from the skies and that I must tutor my soul to blackness. It was a terrible journey for me.

Five weeks after, we were borne to school. It was a bright, sunny day, with just a pinch of coming autumn in the air. There was nothing acutely to depress us, I suppose, since mother was returning in a fortnight or so to see us once again, prior to her journey, for we certainly were in no way depressed. We were even hilarious and gay. The school that had been chosen for us with infinite care, and on the strongest personal recommendation, was at Hove, and the sight of the sea under sunshine is always one of gaiety. Moreover, mother was disposed to disperse the kind of largesse that we most appreciated. Cornucopias of puffy pastry, stuffed to repletion, as it seemed, with cream, were set before us, not in ones and twos, but a full, fair dozen right at the outset. That was a sight to glad our eyes. We soon discovered that those particular cornucopias were fraudulent, and so began to eat them from the narrow end, so as to work up to the heaven of heavens above. Then we leapt and rejoiced along the front,

mother between us somewhat sadder than we were, until we begged her for another visit to the pastry shop, and one more cup of chocolate apiece. Which was not denied us.

Then we were taken back to Hove again, to be left under the charge of Mrs. Pennell.

"Have you had a happy afternoon?" asked that worthy woman. "Well, now we must let mother go back home again." She was thin and slight and wizened a little, but with kindly blue eyes.

Suddenly, on an instant, gloom rushed on us. Tears began to flow. What had seemed a glad holiday, such a holiday, only on a more magnificent scale, as mother had sometimes given us in Bray, now quickly narrowed to tragedy.

"Why, Jack, I'll be back in a fortnight. Frankie, it isn't as if I weren't coming back again to see you soon." So mother attempted to cheer us with brave words and laughing gaiety of tone, she who, I divine, had come to the blackest moment of her life hitherto—as her next words were to show. "You'll take great care of them, won't you, Mrs. Pennell?" Her question quavered on her lips. "And make them happy?"

Then she was gone; and we were led, not in tears but tearful, and wondering most of all, to a large schoolroom brightly lit. As we entered the babel of voices ceased suddenly, magically, and it seemed to us as if a thousand eyes became fixed on us.

"I don't expect Mr. Pennell will want you to do any prep. to-night," said our guide. "But he'll be in presently to see you and decide. In the meantime you'll make yourselves at home, won't you?"

Make ourselves at home! What an expression! The door clicked behind us telling us she was gone. One or two of the voices began speaking again, but the majority still stared at us, as we, I with Frank's hand in mine, went forward and found a form to sit on. There we sat, on the very edge, I with a feeling of eldership mingled with a strange kind of pity towards Frank. Then at last, after what seemed an interminable length of time, a boy came up to us and said:

"You're the new chaps, aren't you?"

"Yes," said I, as the spokesman, defiantly.

“ Oh, what’s your name ? ” came next, as the prelude to a shoal of questions from the increasing number that ringed us round.

VI

SCHOOL

It was our first adventure out into life. We had not finally and absolutely cast loose from our moorings. Mother’s promised visit in a fortnight’s time, on the day prior to her leaving from Tilbury Dock, was a cable that yet held us. But we were loose of the pier, and the roll of the waters was beneath our keel—with the usual result. Some time prior to father’s departure, mother had written Mr. Pennell a lengthy letter in description of our several characters. This he had asked for, and sealed himself a pedant at once. What mother’s reply consisted of, I cannot say, but I very well knew some of the items of it, for they were carefully recited to us one night as we lay in bed. I know there was the painful confession that we were mischievous: what mother was charmed with in father she seemed to dislike in us in its immature form. But the main matter was that she did not think that we appreciated one another as brothers. What precisely the dear soul expected us to do so as to demonstrate our appreciation it would have been interesting to discover. I suppose she thought our fighting—angry and furious fighting—was a proof of our lack of appreciation, instead of its being, as I am sure it was, absolute proof in the contrary direction. The sapient reply that the pedagogue made to this was the suggestion that we should be placed in separate bedrooms, with strange boys. This, said the worthy man, would teach us to love one another. It did not interest me much when I heard this piece of wisdom read out: I felt quite overjoyed at the thought of being rid of Frank for awhile,

and I am sure he reciprocated the emotion. But as I look back on it now, it is certainly amazing to remember the extraordinary approbation that greeted this piece of wisdom.

"He understands the handling of boys," said mother.

"That shows him to be a thinking man who studies the little subtle things that get caught up into our alembics and are refashioned into character. Yes, I should call him a subtle thinker; and a subtle thinker——" So spake my uncle. He never seemed to think that subtlety could be subtle twice so much, and yet never once take a grip of truth. He would, however, have continued indefinitely, had not Aunt Mary cut him short with:

"Do the boys good!"

It was only father that sympathised with us. "Rather rough on the poor beggars, don't you think, and we miles away?" he said. "Still, as you like. You know more about these things than I do."

So the sickness that came on us had no alleviation at all. I had a bedroom with only one other boy. As I sat ruefully undressing on my bed my thoughts were not of him opposite me, but of father on the ocean or in Ceylon, of mother at Uncle Jacob's, and of Frank in some bedroom at the far end of the house. For the first time I was cut away from them all. A good quarrel with Frank would have been homely. I suppose Mr. Pennell would never have thought of a consideration of that kind. I was wrapt in melancholy, with one sock on and one sock off, when a voice suddenly broke in on me:

"I say, your name's Elthorne, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I. He was gazing fixedly at me.

"Mine's Cartwright—Frederick William."

"Mine's Jacob." I flushed red at the mention of it.

"Jacob! Oh my aunt, what a name!"

I was silent: confusion added itself to my unhappiness.

"Still, a chap can't help his name, can he?" he went on. His philosophy warmed me to him; it had a magnificence that could rise above circumstances, however unpropitious they might seem to be. I felt he was the kind of fellow to grow up a debonair free-lance and a true Bohemian. I hurried to agree with him, when he proceeded: "Though what made

your father choose a name like that—! Still, it wasn't your fault. How old did you say you were before prep. ? ”

“ Twelve—nearly.”

“ Oh, you're quite a youngster, aren't you ? I'm thirteen. I'm only a new chap too, you know ! ”

Here was fresh proof of his largeness of mind. He could quite easily have imposed on me as a high-standing, well-approved, old boy, at least until my proof to the contrary could have availed me not at all. I warmed to him more and more. I asked him how long he had been there.

“ Only a week,” said he, “ since the beginning of this term.”

He began then to tell me what the school curriculum was when the prep. master came in to put the lights out. Left in darkness I heard him thump on his knees, and in the darkness saw his body lying across his bed ; and so I took the opportunity also to dismiss my devotions, knowing that now he had begun to be friendly he would resume his recital the moment he was finished. Therefore I hastened my devotions. I was not wrong in my surmise, for immediately he rose he at once swept into a free criticism of “ the old man,” meaning Mr. Pennell thereby, whom as yet I had not seen. His criticism began to grow somewhat disjointed when he had got into bed ; and presently, after a lengthy, painful wait on my part, his heavy breathing gave me to know I was to hear no more. Then my loneliness began to assault and oppress me. I could not control myself. Lest Cartwright should hear me, I drew my clothes right over my head, and, having purchased secrecy thus, sobbed long and bitterly.

VII

I MAKE SOME FRIENDS

The following morning, we, being of the junior school, were called at seven o'clock. A gentle jostling of my shoulders fetched me out of tearful dreams to see a kindly face bent over me. I was asked if my name were not Elthorne. On my replying that it was, the master said kindly: "I must remember that," and went out. He was clean shaven, with deep-set and kindly blue eyes, a strong Roman nose and a firmly modelled chin. But what struck me most about him was his erect bearing, the dignity in his manner and the distinction in his every gesture. He attracted me wonderfully; I asked Cartwright who he was.

"That's Warner," said he, "junior 'class' master."

"Don't you think he's rather fine?" I ventured.

"Oh, Warner is a decent chap. He's quite the best of the crowd." So said Cartwright; and I remember wondering if I should have so supreme an old boy manner in so short a time as a week.

It was required of us that we should be down by half-past seven, and, Cartwright informed me, for every minute of lateness after that time there was a regulation "impot" of thirty lines. I was to mount up many impots in my time; but that morning I was down and in the schoolroom within ten minutes. An almost painful desire to see Frank possessed me, something that was truly a yearning. When I entered the room there was only one person in it, and that was Frank. The sight of him warmed me with a extraordinary joy, and his face flushed to mine.

"Hallo, youngster!" I said, "sleep well?"

"Who're you calling youngster?" he growled.

Then we sat down on the same form, quite close to one another, but each with stoic unconcern.

At twenty-eight minutes past seven we were still the only occupants of the large schoolroom, which was divided into three main divisions by an arrangement of desks. Between that time and the half-hour an increasing flood poured into the room, till it was almost impossible to make oneself heard, such was the din. Cartwright came over to us with the information

that "Warnerdugs was a decent kind of a chap, and always had a whip-up just on time; fellows were rather brutes to be late with a chap like that." At any rate, the result was that I noticed no delinquent that morning, although I could not help but notice a boy near me surreptitiously fastening his braces beneath his closely buttoned coat. Then Cartwright suddenly turned round on Frank.

"Is this your minor?" asked he.

I admitted that it was.

"Oh, good!" said he; then suddenly, and curiously, stopped. His confidence seemed strangely to have gone from him. I was not long to remain in doubt as to the reason for the collapse of his rather splendid assertion—splendid, that is, on the basis of only a week's standing—because at that moment a hand fell with quite unnecessary heaviness on to my shoulder. I turned sharply about to face a tall boy with an open, frank face marred somewhat by greenish, untrustworthy eyes.

"Well," said he, "what are you rubbing your shoulder for?"

"You hurt it," I said aggrievedly.

"Look here, don't give yourself airs, or you'll get into trouble," he said brusquely. "Isn't your name Elthorne?"

I made no reply. I was unaccustomed to representatives of the Deity in long trousers or short.

"Is it?" he said again, following up his question with a grip on my arm that made me writhe.

"Don't do that!" I demanded.

"Hoity-toity, eh? We'll soon show you how to be hoity-toity in this part of the world. Won't we?" This last question was put to another boy who had come up, shorter than the first by a head, slighter in build, and with a delicate, treacherous face.

With his advent the grip on my arm caused me such pain as almost to make me cry out. So I made a quick bite at his hand; I missed it, because he released my arm. Which was the result I wished to attain.

"Frenchy tricks, eh?" went on the first, seizing my hand and twisting my arm behind my back. He seemed to think that I had broken some code of honour in using my natural weapons of defence against an assailant twice my size. His

opinion, I suppose, was confirmed when I kicked out backwards at his shin, nearly sending myself on to my face and dislocating my arm, of which he had fast hold, in the process. However, he had no opportunity of expressing it, for I heard a step behind me, and an authoritative voice addressed my assailant.

"What are you doing, Britain?"

Being released, I turned and saw Mr. Warner standing there with a gleam in his eye that meant trouble.

"He cheeked me, sir!"

"I didn't!" I protested.

"Didn't he, Pole?"

"Rather!"

The code of procedure at such schools is a strange one. Had I not added my protestation there is no doubt that Britain would have received some or other impot. Moreover, with Pole on the field there were two testimonies against my one, and so he got off with no more than a warning. Yet, though it looked like it, this did not, in fact, mean a victory to me. For that morning as we went out for our walk—in which all forms beneath the fifth were bound to participate—while I was walking with Frank away from all the rest, Britain and Pole came up to us. A small set of the junior school had gathered round Mr. Warner while he spun them a story. He had an extraordinary gift in that direction, and I had at first joined that circle. But it was soon evident to me that the story in question went on morning after morning. Consequently, it could have but little interest for me, as already it had been in progress for a week. I envied the manifest excitement of those who were listening. But that very excitement was only an aggravation over and above the initial annoyance of knowing neither the characters nor the plot; and so I drifted away with Frank, having heard enough, however, for me to be able to identify the kind of tale with an author of adventure much beloved by myself. Knowing none of the boys, and, in our misery, not being particularly desirous of knowing any of them, we were thus wandering by ourselves in moody silence when Britain and Pole came up.

"Now you chaps," called the first: "let's play leap-frog. You go down."

Reluctantly we went down, and some three or four others

of equal age with us were brought along to form the line of which I was the last leap. First Pole came along, counting us as he leapt. Then I heard Britain coming after him. But he seemed to halt when he came to myself ; and bent down as I was, I knew not why. Then I received a violent kick that shot me forward on to my nose. I was maddened with pain, and cried out loudly.

"Now then, stow it!" said Britain. "None of your baby tricks here!" He gripped me again by the arm, digging his thumb fiercely into my muscles. "That'll teach you how to sneak. And if you sneak about this, I'll punch your head into a mash."

I was crying with the pain of his kick. I heard a voice beside me say: "Old Britain's a fair brute, that's what he is," but nothing gave such consolation as Frank's hand on my arm and Frank's voice bursting with rage as he said: "I hate him; I'd like to kill him." I think either of us would have killed Britain and Pole at that moment with the keenest of joy.

Nevertheless, however evil and unpropitious this may have seemed to us then, it worked us this much of benefit, that it procured us the friendship of a good many others of Britain's victims. It appeared that his object in coming up to me had been to compel me to do some of his lines for him. Most of the boys in Frank's bedroom had had lines freely apportioned them, which they were under necessity to give Britain that night, for Britain to render to his account the following morning under pain of being stopped-in from football. All of these resolved then and there to strike as a protest. I do not think they succeeded in putting their resolve into effect, however.

After breakfast we were apportioned to our places in the various forms: I to the fourth and Frank to the third. Breakfast was the one meal that the "head's crowd" shared with the school. It took place in the long room beneath the schoolroom, and was comparatively a subdued affair owing to the family circle at the top of the room. Mr. and Mrs. Pennell, a long and thin male Pennell, a short and thin male Pennell, of about Frank's age, a tall and somewhat massive female Pennell, and a short, fair and frail female Pennell with a sausage-like roll of hair along the top of her head, sat round an oval mahogany table, chatting freely among themselves,

but throwing an unhappy spell of subduedness throughout the room. Leading down from that august and awful circle three long deal tables ran, with a master at either end of each, culminating in the nether regions of the junior school.

From where we sat at the end I was not able to take much stock of Mr. Pennell, although a small boy at my elbow incited me to see in him an arch-fiend indeed. But when prayers were over our names were called out by Mr. Pennell, and the general stampede swept past us to the schoolroom upstairs. We were introduced to the Pennell family; Mrs. Pennell said she was sure we were quite happy now; we replied that indeed we were (I had sat down all through breakfast in a state of discomfort not easy to describe); the elder of the female Pennells, who seemed to be the eldest of all the Pennell family, stroked Frank's hair, and said that he was rather a pretty kind of boy, whereat Frank turned turkey-red and looked profoundly uncomfortable; and, after other tortures of this kind, including a sudden interest of the sausage-curl Pennell in Frank, resulting from her sister's remark about the prettiness, we were at last borne off by Mr. Pennell to his study.

After a half-hour's searching interrogatory we were told that our knowledge was quite creditable, but that we had yet much to learn; and I bore away with me the picture of a man somewhat above middle-height and sturdily built. His hair was coarse and plastered immaculately, clearly with the aid of much water. His thick brown moustache was clipped along the mouth line, giving me a curious sense of precision in his speech. I was shortly to hear a confident opinion among the boys that he beat his wife. Which of course was foolish. But I do very well remember how it confirmed my impression of him as a man to whom tenderness and love were things that he had effectually drilled out of himself. In fact, his perfection of drilling was all that he had. As I see it now, he had drilled himself into being a schoolmaster, although he had no training and held no scholastic degree, and could therefore not even have acquired the position of assistant master to himself; he had drilled himself into conceiving this function as a charge from God, as he could have drilled himself into conceiving it as a charge from the other person; he had drilled himself into taking two large houses in Hove, knocking

them into one, and filling them with some hundred and twenty boys ; he had drilled himself into holding his shoulders square and his head erect ; he had drilled himself into despising the cold and not wearing an overcoat ; and in the process he had drilled out of himself whatever he may originally have had of those virtues that make a man lovely and lovable. In the final product he was not a man at all, but a well ordered machine, that had by some odd chance, before the success of the process probably, married and begotten children.

All this was not in my mind as we trod with even an acuter misery up again to the schoolroom. But the basis of it was there, for I remember that my emotion was not that of fear, but rather one of cold dread. That night I asked Cartwright what he thought of Mr. Pennell.

" Oh, Bertie ! Bertie's a brute, and a corking brute ! You know, I would like to get at Warner's real opinion of Bertie. I'll bet you anything you like that Warnerdugs would just like to kick him sometimes."

" I suppose Warner hates him," I said, my mind hard at work on the suggested difference between Mr. Warner and Mr. Pennell.

" I don't suppose Warnerdugs hates anybody, he's not that sort," said Cartwright. " But you should see him sometimes when Bertie comes over to watch him get us through Latin ! Oh, I know old Warnerdugs," he went on authoritatively, " and one of these days he'll get ill over Bertie. Either that or he'll get the push."

I was about to speak further about Mr. Pennell when Mr. Dixon, the prep. master, came in to turn out lights. He had been very good to me that day. Mathematics had always been a plague to my wits, and he had that morning been entrusted to the task of leading me through its futile intricacies in common with the remainder of Form Four. I had irritated him more than once or twice, to judge from the light scarlet flush that suffused his fair face. But he had controlled himself and been patient. He was a slight, small man, and it seemed to me once or twice that his patience was probably a result of his hesitation and nervousness. I was confirmed in this afterwards when I saw the way in which the boys, especially Britain and Pole, took advantage of him. Just before afternoon school I had noticed them almost bullying

him, but Mr. Warner had come up, ostensibly to ask him something, but as it seemed to me, with no other object than to throw off Britain and his confederates by the fact of his presence.

When Mr. Dixon had put out the lights and gone, with a half-shy but kindly "Good-night!" to each of us, Cartwright at once said:

"Oh, I say, how does Dicky strike you?"

"He's a decent chap, I think. I like him!"

"Frightful mug!"

"Is he?"

"He's an awful soft. You can do what you like with him, and I've got no use for that kind of chap."

Now I needed no summoning to combat. "Why," said I, "should a chap be the worse for being soft? I wish I could play as well as he does at footer, anyhow."

"Oh, he's all right at footer, come to that! But a mug's no earthly as a master. Pooh!"

"Not with beasts under him, I suppose."

There was a long silence after this. I could hear, and dimly see, Cartwright as he moved about his bed arranging his clothes. He seemed unduly contemplative about it.

"The chaps mostly are," he suddenly said, and with that sweeping condemnation he plunged beneath the clothes, the bed creaking and groaning as he made himself comfortable in it.

"Well, hang it all!" I began again, after a further lapse of time, prepared to continue in the defence of an oversensitive Mr. Dixon, when a steady breathing from the direction of Cartwright's bed arrested me. "Are you asleep, Cartwright?" I said timidly in the darkness. No answer came to me, and with the knowledge that he was asleep a terrible loneliness fell about me, and again I put my head beneath my bed-clothes the more freely to sob bitterly. The human soul, I suppose, longs for company that is nearest and most possible. The memory of a father and mother far removed from me made me long not for them but for Frank. I thought of the stretch of darkness that separated me from him as something immense and inviolable, like interstellar space, and my thought rose in rebellion against it because, immense though it was, it was yet not so immense as

to be removed beyond protest. I do not know how long I lay so, in a misery that no sleep would assuage. Finally I summoned a desperate courage to my soul. I drew myself noiselessly out of my bed and tiptoed very gently across the room. As noiselessly, with every nerve strung tightly like a sharp fiddle-string, I drew open the door, and, setting it ajar behind me, stood out on the landing in the night that lately had appalled my thought. A gas-flame flickered on the landing above the one I stood on, turned low, sending a murky yellow light on to the old varnished wall-paper, and so down the iron-rimmed flight of stairs. From the room beside ours to the right of me a continued whisper came, and I knew that the boys there, fifth form fellows all of them, were still talking together in the dark. But this light and this whisper, being like ghostly suggestions of their prototypes, only appalled me the more, and I shivered with fear. Yet I held to my resolve, and began slowly to go up the stairs, stepping well within each separate stair so as to avoid the cold iron rims with my bare feet.

Steadily I mounted the stairway and made my way along the landing above ours. Here all was silent. At the end of the landing I turned to the left and stood opposite the open doorway that had been cut between the two houses. I had, as I knew, to enter this other house to make my way up two more stories before I came to the dormitory that Frank shared with four others of his own age. I had up to now framed no course of action, acting on impulse only, but now the difficulties of my adventure assailed me. What would happen when I actually had achieved Frank's dormitory? Would I enter? What would the other boys think? What would Frank himself think? Would they wake?

But I thrust these questions down unanswered, and held to my resolve. It appalled me to notice that the other house was in darkness. The opening before me loomed like a cave. On tiptoe, and with all my muscles hardset, I entered it, however, and found that up the well of the staircase a bright light shone, illumining nothing but the midmost air. It seemed as though the staircase wound up the walls, cased in pitchy darkness, round a central pillar of light. To assure myself that the light had indeed an actual and definite origin, so phantasmal did it seem, I trod over to the banisters and

looked down. The tessellated flags of the hall shone far beneath me, under a lamp that was hidden from me by the ironwork twining about like serpents. These were Mr. Pennell's private quarters I saw. All was silent and deathly still.

Suddenly I heard a door open and a voice call out something loudly; it was Miss Pennell's, I remember. A loud laughter rang piercingly up the stairs, the door closed with a bang, a step rang sharply out upon the hall flags. It all occurred suddenly, even violently, and completely unstrung my tightened nerve. I stood awhile with thumping heart and shaking limbs, and then fled in fear. I half-ran, half-fell down the stairs, and slamming my own bedroom door behind me threw myself into bed and pulled the clothes over me.

"What's that?" I heard Cartwright say, and his bed creaked as he sat up in it. All was quiet again for awhile, and then I heard him get out of bed and come over to me.

"Elthorne, are you awake?" he asked again. I said nothing, and sought to make no move. "Elthorne!" he said once more, as though sure that I could hear him.

"I went to see if I could find my brother," I said rapidly, thrusting my hand out from beneath the clothes.

"Well, you are a rum chap!" His tone emphasised his words.

"You won't sneak, will you?" I asked him timidly, still full of fear.

"As if I should!" There was indignation in his note. "But you take the fair cake!" he went on as he philosophically re-entered his bed, to fall asleep soon after.

It was not till near morning that sleep came to me.

VIII

OUT UPON THE WATERS FINALLY

The morning that mother was to return for her final farewell to us was not one on which either Frank or I showed our best. We were both in the big schoolroom, I remember, the fourth form in the centre and the third to the left. A fair distance lay between us, and by a device of screens our respective masters (Mr. Warner for me and Mr. Dixon for Frank) were hid from each other, so procuring the privacy of the classes as a whole more surely than one would think to have been the case. We were each of us at our favourite subjects, those, that is to say, in which we were most proficient: I at Latin, Frank at mathematics. But we neither displayed much prowess that morning. His glance was continually wandering over to mine, as mine to his.

Once I heard Mr. Dixon call out sharply: "Elthorne minor, will you pay attention?" his fair face flushing hot-red. At this Mr. Pennell, who was taking the fifth form in English to our right, scowled down the length of the room over his spectacles. But I do not think it made much difference. Each little sound caught our attention and caused our hearts to beat. Mr. Warner to me was far more kind. He had learnt from me that morning whom we were expecting, and my heart warmed as I saw him time upon time pass over obvious delinquencies of mine. In sheer gratitude I tried to fasten my attention on to proceedings, futilely however.

At last I caught the far echo of a bell rung, and it was ten minutes after the time when mother's train was due to arrive, as my watch bade me know. At once my eye caught Frank's, and his sprang to mine. How we bore the next quarter of an hour I do not know. We hated Mrs. Pennell for her long tongue of civil exchanges that caused this terrible delay. When at last the door was opened, and Mrs. Pennell's voice outside was heard to say, "Jacob and Frank Elthorne," we sought to leave as decorously as might be. With what success I cannot tell. I did not even notice the "Jacob."

Never so long as I live shall I forget that morning. Mother was dressed in her would-be puritanical, but really exquisitely coquettish, brown dress. A muff of darker brown lay in her

lap as she sat in the bay of the Pennells' window, bathed and illumined by the delicate autumn sunlight. I had not time to take the details of the picture when I entered, but it must have eaten its way into my mind as on the chemicals of a photographic plate, for my mind held a perfect picture immediately thereafter and ever onwards. It lived so in my later recollection. At the time both Frank and I, without further waiting, threw ourselves into mother's arms sobbing wildly, while she protested gently, fondling us the while, and Mrs. Pennell, with less wit than I gave her credit for, stood by and remarked that this was indeed a strange way in which to show our joy at seeing our mother. Her kindly wish, too often, was marred by an officious instinct.

Mother had considerable trouble in quieting us, but at last she did so, and Mrs. Pennell left us, saying that at mother's wish the rest of the day, till mother left, was to be ours to spend with her. This she announced with the manner of one who conferred a considerable favour. We had never expected anything else. When she left mother dried our eyes saying :

"It will never do to go out with red eyes like that ! But whatever made you cry so ? Aren't you glad to see me ? "

I blurted out : " Mother, that Cartwright is not a nice chap. I don't like him. Couldn't I be put in the same room as Frank ? "

This was, I knew too well, grossest treason to Cartwright, whom I liked well. But the atmosphere of the school was about me, and I had already begun to feel that to get any one thing it was necessary to ask for it on some ground that, personally speaking, had nothing to do with it. To feel an objection to Cartwright would, to Mr. Pennell, have seemed a far more intelligible if not worthy thing than to have yearned for my own brother. And mother, I knew, would have to put my request before Mr. Pennell.

" But," said she, " I thought you liked him, Jack ? "

" Yes," I answered, " I do, and I don't. He's not a nice chap. He doesn't pray." Why could not folk regard a request, a desire, as an excellent thing in itself, without reason to it ?

" Doesn't he ? But Mr. Pennell told me his people were nice Christian people."

" Oh, but mother, may I ? I don't want to be with Cartwright ; I want to be with Frank." To be compelled to speak

of my preference for him in Frank's own company seemed to me an untold ignominy.

"And so you shall, Jack," mother assented heartily, seeing me on the verge of tears again, though it was clear that she was far from understanding me. "I shall speak to Mrs. Pennell about it, and it shall be done. Now, let us go out!" I think she herself felt the oppressiveness of the place.

As the day when she first brought us down, the sunlight shone, with the delicate lustre proper to it in early autumn, on the waters of the sea that was whipped into gaily leaping waves by a steady south-west wind that blew. The scene was bright and gay, and the beat of the waves on the shingle was exhilarating, being neither so mighty as to be terrific nor so gentle as to lull the mind. Everything, as we walked down the front towards Brighton, made for a serenity of joy. The very elegance of the dresses the women wore, and the culture, if false and languid culture often, of their faces, tended in the same direction. It was just a day as should have made a reunion a rich, enfolding experience. But there was not much joy in it to us. Speech itself, the coverlet of sorrow, failed us, although mother made painful efforts to whip it into existence. When she urged it so, it rose into being with better intention than success, soon to relapse into moody silence.

So it was all that afternoon, as we sat in a seat on the front and looked across the sea. Mother asked about our scholarship; sought to know of the friends we made, how we liked Mr. and Mrs. Pennell, and so forth; gave us news of father and his doings; told us that it would not be long before he and she would be back again to see us, while we caught the misgiving in her own brave words; and generally sought to make us forget, what we could not forget, the underlying sorrow in it all, because she herself was as much oppressed with it as ever we were. When she finally rose to return to the school, and we knew that we were now within appreciable distance of the final parting, it seemed to me that no torrent of tears could adequately express or assuage the fierce and terrible pain of that moment. I could have sold the whole world, I would have sold my soul and future happiness (that my instinct and training had not made light things to me, young though I was), and thought nothing of it, to have kept my mother at that moment.

So great was my pain that even now it is almost intolerable for me to write of it. The futile platitudes at school over, we went to the station to see mother off. She herself was silent now. What was the stupid irrelevant addition of gain to my father's annual income beside all this! How incalculably wrong-eyed and foolish men are in their outlook on life! Mother would never even have taken into a first, much less a second, consideration the Colombo offer. At the station she caught us to her with something of a wild, hopeless tenderness, and the tempest of our grief tore our bodies. To this moment I can recall her waving handkerchief and her dear face as the train curved away out of the station, leaving us two solitary units on the platform. It seemed to me then that we should never meet again. Sorrow is strangely prophetic sometimes. I put my arm about Frank's shoulder, and he did not resist me, as we trailed out of the great, gloomy, busy station.

It was Mr. Warner who came to our rescue as we entered the schoolhouse that evening.

"Well," said he, his fine face lighting up into a dignity of kindness that Mr. Pennell, I fear, would have thought most unprofessional, "it's not a nice business, is it?" And he put an arm about each of our shoulders.

His sympathy broke down again the self-command that we had been at such effort to achieve.

"Look here, you chaps had better go straight to bed. I'll put the rest right." I simply looked up at him. How swiftly he divined my thoughts! "And you, Elthorne, would like to have your minor in with you to-night, wouldn't you? I'll arrange with young Cartwright for you to change beds to-night. You go and get your things down, and I'll tell him to get his things out. You leave all the rest to me."

What a man he was, as I look back on him now! I hope I have done some kindly deeds like that!

In a week's time, by mother's arrangement, I was removed to Frank's dormitory. Cartwright, to my great joy, came with me, one of the fellows already there being moved to make room for us two. We two became the eldest members of that dormitory, and though he at first took the leadership of it I seem to remember that I soon supplanted him in this. There was no contention in it. He accorded it as naturally as I seem to have taken it.

IX

I BEGIN TO FIND MYSELF GENERALLY IN PEOPLE'S WAY

When school broke up that term, Frank and I mixed freely in all the gaiety and excitement of the occasion. That is to say, we were to share in all the pomp and ostentation of the procession, as it were, holding fiercely on to that because we knew well that its inner reality was lost to us. These others were all gay because mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, awaited them, to love and quarrel with, forbear with and disapprove of; they were excited because Christmas festivities were before them, festivities in which they had a right and title, which they might very well find not at all up to their expectation, which they might very well be disgusted with, presents and all, but in which their disgust and expectation was not an impertinence. Any one of their realisations of the event might arguably be as disappointing as ours was to be. But they had their right to disappointment. We had not. They had a certain proprietary that we could not claim. We had to look forward to an aunt who somewhat repelled us, and an uncle who alternated between wild concern and utter disregard, and who irritated us in one as he caused us to feel subdued in the other; we had to look forward to pale, sometimes hectic, festivities at which we were guests, and at which the real proprietary was loudly asserted by our cousin Henry, whom we both dubbed an unconscionable prig, and of whose future as a man we, as we confided to one another, shuddered to think. Moreover, and this was the poignant note that raised irritation to tragedy, this was our first Christmas away from home. Behind the figures of a restless, lean, black-bearded Uncle Jacob, and a cold, austere, pale and handsome Aunt Mary, loomed, as by way of bitter contrast, our tall, handsome, vivacious, practical-joking father, who was always annoyed if others did not take his practical joking in good part, and our winsome, lovely and self-denying mother. Behind the exquisitely furnished house in Hampstead, conceived throughout with the eye of an artist, shone the homely house in Saggart, the mist on the dark hills, the two favourite robins, the pale, fitful December sunshine, the musical richness of the voices of the people, the sense of freedom and homeliness, the shops

in Grafton Street, and, above all, mother's bustling and mysterious activity, her round, great, splendid puddings, the mystic threepenny bits therein that roused us, father most of all, to such excitement, Cousin Bas with his high-pitched, infectious laughter, and father's own irrepressible high spirits and vivacity, his interminable gaiety and jokes both with us and with Cousin Bas, his spending money with both hands on this great occasion of the year, and his fecund wit for games in which he, Cousin Bas, Frank and myself, and often mother, played like uproarious children of an equal age, till Maurya would exclaim in a mixture of wonder and laughter: "Ah, did ye ever now! And if master isn't the one!"

Behind the lean prospect all this exceeding richness shone, and caused me many heavy broodings. I wondered what Maurya was doing, she who had come so strangely to seem part of the household, in a sense that cannot surely happen out of Ireland. Particularly I wondered what Cousin Bas would do, who had sent us several wonderful and extraordinary epistles (letters they cannot be called) during term. It seemed to my instinct then, and I approve it most heartily now, that these had a claim on father that lay far nearer beauty and sanity than any advancement in his commercial career. All this depressed me. It drove me into the caves of melancholy, where, if the lights are sombre, many beauties lie. Nevertheless, the bustle and activity about me, the general buzz of anticipation, and the eager comparing of hopes, fetched me out as often as I went in; and both Frank and I took our healthy part in the excitement that went forward, though its occasion lacked in us. Even the wild joy of the train journey—where my top-hat got sadly crushed in a confined game of leap-frog, and was pushed out and carefully smoothed over by each of the fourteen boys in the compartment save Frank, rather to the worsening of its already dilapidated appearance—was shared by both of us.

But the following year even this was denied us. The stream went by us, and left us gazing at its turbulence. Something had gone wrong somewhere, the nature of which I can only guess at now, with the result that Mr. Pennell informed us that he had "not been able to receive a satisfactory letter from Mrs. Mueller, and that until he did so we would have to continue at the school." So we gloomily watched the boxes being

packed, and the hopes and anticipations being exchanged, knowing ourselves to be outside of it all. For a time no one paid any attention to us. It was scarcely to be expected that they should, for had they not their own great absorptions? But it was just the note that sufficed to turn grim misfortune into suffering. At last, however, Cartwright and Ransome, who were my own especial cronies, came up to me.

"I say, you know, it's rotten, this is," said the former, sitting beside me and surveying the toes of his boots as he thrust out his legs.

"What's rotten?" I said, with an affectation of grim unconcern.

"Why, your being stuck up in this hole of a place," broke in Ransome, in his quaint, excited way. "I say with Cartwright, it's rotten, and it ought to be stopped."

"Oh; who's going to stop it?"

"Somebody ought to. It oughtn't to be allowed. Hang it, it's not the game; and I'm shot if it is."

"Watching us gas about our people, and pack up, and all that sort of thing," explained in Cartwright.

"Well, I suppose we've got to shove through with it." I spoke with a stoicism I was far from feeling.

"I say, what do you say to going down town?" Cartwright said suddenly.

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Haven't got leave for one thing, have we?"

"That's all right. Cartwright and I have just asked Bertie. Let's go to Patrioni's." Patrioni was famous for his cream tarts, and some of the sixth form fellows had already gone there.

"Don't mind." It would have been bad form had I shown any signs of the eager joy that lit up in me at the prospect.

"But what about the minor?"

"He's going with some fourth form chaps."

"Oh, I can't." I remembered suddenly that a bunch of keys, one penny and two halfpennies, was all the wealth my pockets held. I wondered, too, as to Frank.

"Bosh!" said Cartwright. "We're standing treat in this—Ransome and I."

"Thanks awfully!"

"Look here," broke in Ransome hurriedly, "let's get, or we'll be frightfully out of it. Your minor's gone, you know."

I caught their purport, and saw in it a wider scheme than at first it had seemed to be, for Frank's exchequer was in no better state than mine. It moved me curiously as I went with them.

The morning on which school broke up we awoke to discover a snow-mantled bright world, and glee winged high. Vivacity became twice as vivacious, and to expectations no bounds could be set. Frank and I were exhilarated not less than the others, but as, after breakfast, we trod our way with the fellows to see them off at the station, I must admit (at least for myself) that the snowballs I flung were shot with some bitterness at my opponents. And as we turned back presently alone, along the roads that lately had rung with our voices and laughter, we sought to pick up snowballs against each other. But it was a miserable failure.

When we returned to the schoolhouse we discovered that a magnificent project was afoot for the general entertainment. Miss Pennell and the elder of her brothers, abetted eagerly by the two junior members of the family and a friend of hers that had arrived the previous day to spend Christmas with them, had drawn out the large school toboggan. It would have been dangerous to have used it, I imagine, for it had a seating capacity for eight people. We anticipated excitement, and were stirred accordingly. After lunch, however, we were made acquainted with the unrivalled splendour of the project, and from two to five o'clock, while the rest of the household (save Mr. Pennell, who did not suffer himself this relaxation from the habit of discipline) in warm furs sat upon the vehicle, Frank and I nearly broke our backs, and utterly broke our winds, drawing the merry party about the town.

Yet it was on the following day that the bitterness of it all rose to a pitch that was almost too acute to be borne. As on the previous day, when tea was over we took our way up to the big schoolroom. One of its three chandeliers, and one of its two gas stoves, were lit for our especial benefit, with the result that we were in the radius of a small glow of light surrounded by a profound and appalling darkness. Moreover, this outer darkness assailed our lighted region with its cold,

and we were compelled to sit almost upon the stove in order to get the smallest sensation of warmth. I occupied myself with reading one *Boy's Annual*, and Frank another. We each, to be sure, had tracked every serial in them to its conclusion more than once, and had read and re-read all the shorter tales; but it was a question of a third reading or school primers—and we chose the third reading. It is easy to see that interest of this kind cannot very properly be spoken of as absorbing, and the result was that after a while I fell a-musing. My mind turned back two years to the old days at Saggart, that were already becoming dim and distant. The darkness that lay around me, into which I saw rows of desks disappear, from light yellow to dim grey and so on into suggestion, like steps into infinity, seemed a proper background for such memories, fair and wondrous as they were, fading into distance. So, by mutable pictures, I passed to wondering what manner of homes the other fellows had. I tried to imagine what they might be doing at that moment of time. I tried to imagine it as something unreal, as something I might have read of in the great book I clasped on my knees, when it came on me with a shock of wonder and pain that it was not something unreal at all, that they at that moment actually were living and breathing, maybe laughing and bragging, certainly enjoying themselves. Involuntarily I spoke out.

“Minor!”

For answer he let fall his book and looked over at me.

“What do you think the other chaps are doing—now?”

For a minute he did not reply, then: “Shut up!” he snapped, and returned to his book somewhat determinedly.

I do not think he achieved much reading. For me, I know, reading was a thing out of the question. A train of imagination having been set up, it would not be denied. After a long silence I said again:

“I expect just about now they’re putting up the holly and mistletoe.” It was the day before Christmas Eve.

“Oh, I say, do shut up,” Frank broke out in a storm of protest at once, letting me know that his thoughts too had been on the subject. “Isn’t it rotten enough to be like this without——?” He did not finish his sentence. His voice thickened on his last word and he stopped himself quickly.

What would have happened to his emotion I do not know, for at that moment "Gentle Sue," the school servant, came in with our supper on a tray, two cups of cocoa and four hard biscuits apiece, "dog-biscuits" as we called them.

"Here's your supper," said she, and added, "I expect you find it lonely, don't you?"

Frank scowled at her.

"Don't!" I said. "But if you're very good, Gentle Sue, you can sit down and talk to us."

Admirable "Gentle Sue"! She did so. And I think, if I remember rightly, before she fled hastily to escape the "missis goin' on," she caused me to thrill with music by giving me my first love-kiss.

It was not for me to blame the Pennells. I did not blame them then. Indeed, I imagine I defended them against Frank's querulous complaint. They had their circle complete, and we could only have broken it. They left us outside because, from their point of view, our proper place was outside. In some ways, miserable though we were, we were yet less miserable than we would have been had we been admitted to the circle. For we held Mr. Pennell in positive dread. I had once won the estimation of the fellows that I was a brave, bold hero because, on an instinct of courtesy, I had ventured to point out to him that he had a dent in his bowler hat: such was the petrifying fear he had cast on us. And no holidays could have dismissed that fear. For Mr. Pennell holidays demanded more discipline than school-hours, since the temptations to relaxation were more. Only that afternoon he had allotted us some or other imposition for some or other recalcitrancy. Impots. in holidays! It violated all our sense of honour and decency. I had pointed this out with some indignation to Frank. "What's decency got to do with Bertie?" came his growling and suggestive rejoinder.

But we had our meals with the family. And when, the following morning at breakfast, I saw a letter for me in Cartwright's handwriting, and discovered it to contain an invitation from that stout friend, one from him and a confirmation from his mother, for both of us to spend Christmas at his place. I bit hard on my tongue to hold myself from startling the assembled Pennells with a loud shout of joy. It was a full five minutes before I dared permit myself to speak, for fear

of showing an eagerness that he would have deemed it his duty to discipline by withholding his permission from the acceptance of the invitation. He himself was reading a letter when I ventured to address him.

"Sir!"

For answer he pulled his spectacles down to the tip of his nose and looked over at me.

"Sir, Cartwright has written asking if Frank and I can go to spend the holidays with him—to go to-day. Can we, sir?"

"I'm afraid not," he replied, with a smile that with him indicated that he thought he had made a humorous remark.

My whole being sickened at his words. Such pure malignity, however, seemed inconceivable, and I returned to the charge with a tone that suggested that to me so painful a matter was no occasion for cold jokes.

"But he has written to ask us," I said, holding out the letter.

"I am perfectly well able to understand English, Elthorne, and I heard you say that before," he said, leaving me to withdraw the letter dismally.

All the whole heavens became dark and gloomy to me. I looked gloomily on the letter that lately had seemed so fair and now seemed so useless, and there was weeping done somewhere though my eyes were dry. I drooped before the eye of my tormentor.

"You spoke a little too soon," went on his cold, unvarying voice. "I have a letter here from Mrs. Mueller, in which she says that she wishes you to spend Christmas with her. You are very fortunate to have so kind an aunt."

Aunt Mary, to us, was a prospect very little fairer than school. Hampstead was not to be weighed in the balances with Cartwright's home in Hampshire.

"But we would rather go to the Cartwrights', sir. Wouldn't we, Frank?"

Before Frank could answer, however, Mr. Pennell had broken in:

"You ought to be ashamed of expressing such a sentiment, Elthorne. You deserve a severe imposition for it. After your kind relatives are willing to upset their domestic arrangements for you!" The horror of the thing passed his expres-

sion. It even brought a little warmth into his voice. The phrase clung to me though, for I seemed to catch in it an echo of Aunt Mary's own words, and it put so violent a distaste into me against going to a house where Frank and I manifestly were not wanted, that it even drove me into the courage of a fresh attempt.

"Mayn't we go to Cartwright's, Mr. Pennell?" There was in my voice the suggestion of a courage that was prepared to take the bit in his teeth, and the "Mr. Pennell" was the sign of it.

It caused Mr. Pennell to prick up his ears. He threw himself back on his invincible coldness.

"Get your boxes packed immediately after breakfast. You will be going before lunch to-day."

To my immense surprise who should be waiting for us at London Bridge station but Uncle Jacob himself. Aunt Mary was not even there. Nor was the hated Henry. The sight of the solitary uncle so amazed Frank and myself that we were futilely trying to realise the situation when he came up to us.

"Well, well, boys, and here we are! Another Christmas come round again, you see! And we're all growing older, aren't we?" All this friskiness, too, was a strange thing from him to us, though not strange from him to certain friends of his that wrought designs and schemes for his business. "We'll just get along now. You are both looking very well. That's good. Excellent."

So he talked on, continually, in his breathless way, as he led us to his cab that awaited us.

X

I FIGHT A GREAT FIGHT, WITH A SAD RESULT

Some have called me an egoist. Probably the epithet is a correct one, but it is only fair to say that such egoism has a very real humility for twin. Egoism, like most labels, is a meaningless phrase that masks a mass of emotions both evil and good, and good not less than evil.

I recall that immediately the novelty and strangeness of school life had worn off me, I had begun to take the lead in most things when the lead lay open to me, and hungered for the lead whenever it was denied me. I had always taken the lead with Frank, and most surely then when he most grumbled at it. I had at once taken the lead in the dormitory, although Cartwright was older than I, taller than I, and stronger than I. He had most loyally supported me in my self-assumed leadership, except in wayward moments of satiety and rebellion. The bullying of Britain and Pole, fiendish, cruel, and persistent as it was, galled me not so much by reason of the pain it gave me as by the fact it dimmed my sense of leadership, and injured me in the eyes of my fellows. And when one day at football Pole sought to dribble past me, and I flung myself at him in a furious charge that bore us both to the ground, although the shock left me with a headache for the rest of the day (it left him with a limp for a week) my joy was unqualified, for it caused me to be deleted from the carefully chosen list of victims that he and Britain practised their craft upon. This had opened to me new fields of conquest, which I had not been slow to enter.

My conquests never managed to overtake my ambitions, however. In Ireland we had not played football at all, and my first ambitions at school had been directed towards a place in the first eleven. A loftier or more remote ambition at that time could scarcely have been conceived. It took me a year to achieve, and a year at that time of life is as a thousand. Mid-way through my second autumn term I had been asked by the captain to take my trial in a match. Our captain, I may say, used at times to play for Hove, and my pride was correspondingly a significant matter. I had played three or four such games during that term, but had not yet won my first-

eleven cap, for which I lusted. I never doubted myself as worth it. I used to lie awake at night, and alternate dreams of football matches in which I played surpassingly well, with eager arguments with the captain that demonstrated to him finally that odd and spasmodic match-play was no test of a fellow's game, that continuous fine play drew out fine play, that it gave tone to one's play, to say nothing of the important effect responsibility had on any fellow really worth his salt.

But when, after our return to school from Hampstead, where Uncle Jacob had maintained his initial jollity with extraordinary success, and Aunt Mary had had hardly a kind word to throw on us, the captain had called me into one of the smaller class-rooms and told me that I was to receive my cap and that my name would appear in the team for the first match, and so regularly onward, I could almost have wept with a joy that was humiliating in its intensity. I felt uplifted with a heavenly nobility. It needed no command then to forgive my enemies. I forgave them one and all freely. I could have given all my worldly goods away unstintingly, I felt as though I really wished to do so, so as to approve myself worthy the honour. For I recognised it as an honour, although I felt that I was worthy of it. We had had a strangely awkward and unhappy time on our holiday. Uncle Jacob, with his new and mysterious desire to please us and make us at home, was only present during the evening. Aunt Mary had been frigidity incarnate, and it had been impossible to give the incorrigible Henry the thrashing that we both decided was the only thing that could save his soul. Moreover, a new trouble, by the name of Mary, had by now arisen to power and turbulence, with whom, and her nurse, we had often been left while Henry and Aunt Mary went out for the day. But all these weighed as nothing with a velvet cap, mauve and yellow, silver tasselled, in the opposing scale. They were less than nothing. Indeed, they were a proper introductory discipline.

So I felt then. And when the following Saturday, after school, the captain presented me with the velvet honour, and when, later on, I stepped on the spongy turf with it capping my head, I felt humbled to tears. Honour has always attuned me to itself. I played that afternoon with such vigour and keenness that the captain openly thanked me in the pavilion, before the whole team, when the match was over.

Out of this trouble arose. For, while my position in the field was left-half, Britain was centre-half, and thus collisions came. Like most bullies he had a mean soul, and my initial prowess in the field angered and embittered him. He tried to spoil my play by encroaching on my side of the defence. I protested to him, but he only told me to mind my own business—which, as is clear, it was my wish to do. However, I soon had an opportunity of settling accounts level. For once when he intruded on to my play, the ball was quickly put into the centre of the field and a very dangerous rush developed. How it quite came about I do not know: I suppose a sort of instinct had sent me round to the exposed gap, for no sooner had the rush developed than I leapt in, foiled it, and sent the ball up the field again—thus doing Britain's work while he poached on mine. In a loud and clamorous tongue, as his way was when annoyed, the captain abused Britain roundly, and passed me a hearty compliment.

I knew that several of the fellows thought Britain had been unjustly treated in this, but the superiority of my position I think must have got into my blood, for I paid little attention to it, save one discussion with my cronies Cartwright and Ransome. During the following week, one day immediately before afternoon school, as I sat preparing some or other subject that till then I had not looked at, I heard Britain stride into the schoolroom and immediately proceed to give the arm-screw to one of the second form fellows. He always did this, and it was generally submitted to in silence, for fear of greater evils. But this time there was a yelp.

"Oh, you bully!"

"Hullo! What's that! Cheeky, eh?" came the reply, with a further twist of the arm.

"Yes, you are. And you're going to be dropped out of the team next match."

"What do you say?" The twisted arm was released as Britain seized the youngster to turn him round for his questioning. There was amazement and alarm in his voice. I, too, picked up my ears.

"Yes, you are."

"Who told you that?"

"Young Elthorne."

"Oh, did he?" saying which, Britain strode out of the room.

I sprang up at this. "Did the minor tell you that?" I asked Britain's late victim as he nursed his arm, and I could see from his face that it was a lie he had told to distract his tormentor's attention. So I fled out of the room in a white heat of anger to find where Britain was going.

I had not to go far. For in the hall downstairs I saw Frank excitedly undertaking an exchange of stamps with another fellow, while between him and myself Britain was slowly and deliberately advancing on him. We all faced the same way, so that Frank neither saw Britain, nor did Britain see me.

"So I'm to going be chucked out of the team, am I?"

Frank cried out in surprise and pain as Britain gripped him by the hair, and, putting his knee into the small of his back, drew him suddenly backwards. Immediately I flung myself upon him, with the result that, slipping on the flags, the three of us slid forward and fell in a heap in the vestibule beyond, considerably to the astonishment of the youngster with whom Frank had just been bargaining.

When Britain picked himself up he was furious. So was I. He had eyes only for Frank. I had eyes only for him.

"I'll teach you," he said, seizing hold of Frank's arm.

"Stop it!" I cried out stridently.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, turning round on me. "You'd better clear out of this."

"Not till we settle this," I said, my sudden flame of anger passing to a fierce obstinacy. It had to come to this, and it had best be done with. Not for a long time would I find myself so prime for it as now.

"Get out! I've got to settle with your minor." And he seized Frank's arm again.

I flung myself at him again, and the struggle that ensued was interrupted by the sound of steps coming up from the basement. It was Mr. Warner. "Now then, come along, school!" he said, waving us before him as he made his way to the gong.

"Half-past four in the boot-room, young Elthorne, and I'll smash your face," Britain said to me as we went up the stairs. And I gave him my assent, and braced myself to the thought of it.

The boot-room was the scene of all deadly encounters. And half-past four was generally the hour chosen for such matters, because immediately after afternoon school Mr. Pennell retired from our sight to the bosom of his family. If one of us had ever breathed a word reflecting on him or his he would have attacked us mercilessly with birch or ruler, attacked us till a cry of pain, if the anguish in it was sufficiently poignant, satisfied his wounded honour. But he was the only person who was suffered to take such reprisals. If he attacked his defenceless insulters, that was punishment. If any of us defended our honour, and gave our opponent an honest fighting chance withal, then that was broiling and seeking to deface the image of God. Such was the code that he had arranged for his own satisfaction, and, knowing it, we fought our affairs of honour when and where he was least likely to disturb us.

It made an ideal place for a fight. Lined round on three sides by rows of lockers, and tiled with stone, it made a fall so serious a matter that each pugilist fought with terrible desperation long after his strength was spent. On the fourth side of the room was the sink—where we washed on compulsion after football, and gave our silk hats the famous water-shine on Sundays—and a low cupboard, on which sat the privileged spectators. I remember the brass handles and keyholes of the white lockers shining in interminable rows round and above me as I stripped and stood to face Britain that afternoon. He was half a head taller than I, and bigger all over in proportion, and so I bit on my lips to rouse myself to such a Berserker rage as I had read of and heard Mr. Warner tell of. This had been Cartwright's advice to me. He and Ransome were my seconds; Pole and another fellow (I forget who) were seconds for Britain. Frank was amongst the chosen half-dozen spectators on the cupboard.

"Stand your ground, and lead him on a bit," said Cartwright to me.

"Don't be an ass! You go straight for his eye and plug it up!" whispered Ransome excitedly as they both pushed me into the arena.

Ransome's words rang in my ears, and touched a necessity in my soul, as Britain and I stood facing each other circling round and about each other. I slipped forward quickly, and

leaping impetuously above Britain's guard, struck wildly at his eye. I missed it, and my knuckle fell on his cheek-bone instead, leaving it flushed and angry. It was a miss, but it was a glorious miss. The spectators on the cupboard took me at once within their favour, while Ransome and Cartwright called on me to keep at it. Writers may say what they will about fighters fighting better when they fight cautiously. That blow on his cheek made Britain fight cautiously and with care at once, thereby robbing his fight of half its sting. My opening success may have made me careless, but it gave me devilry, which was the main matter.

But Britain had length of arm and weight of muscle. He was brawny, whereas I was slight. So, as we surged to and fro, if he landed fewer blows on me than I on him, the total effect was that the advantage lay with him. Yet the spectacular effect was mine, and this gave me a substantial advantage in the cheers that backed me. To and fro thus we surged, stepping and edging round the brass knockers, each of which gleamed with uncanny brightness in the flaring gas-light. There was no cessation. It had been decided that we should observe the rule of the school, and fight through. And we stood finally, blown and weary, for a breather.

Suddenly then, as we stood so, breathing heavily and glaring at each other, Britain leapt at me with his fist drawn back for a mighty blow. I threw up my arm in an attempt to ward it off, with the result that it fell on my forehead and threw me violently against the lockers, very nearly stunning me. He was not slow to make the utmost of his advantage, for he rained blows on me, beating me to my knees. Then one of those strange things happened that so often in life make misfortune the very basis of recovery. Looking up, with my arms raised above my head to ward off his blows, I saw his face (I see it now), saw along it rather, in three-quarter perspective, smiling malignly. I jumped to my feet, right within his guard, so that my head forced its way between his arms and struck his chin. He fell over, staggering to the floor. Yet, though Cartwright and the excitable Ransome called on me to "plug him," I was too sick with his blows to do anything. I let him rise to his feet, and we stood glaring at each other.

It was clearly impossible for either of us, under the

circumstances, to demand a "best" of the other, and the whole field hung irresolutely when our spy fled into the room crying: "Cave, Warnerdugs!" He was none too good a spy. I suspect his attention had been chiefly within the room, for hard upon his heels came Mr. Warner himself, and we all stood, trapped and defiant. Straight and upright he stood there by the door, his clear eye taking in each detail of the situation. It last rested on Britain and myself; he with blood dripping from his mouth, I with certain bruises on my face and arms. I almost think he smiled, but it was hard to tell when Warnerdugs smiled. His mouth was always firm: it was his eyes that gave his smile.

"Oh, it's you two, is it?" he asked, almost as though he had expected it. "What about the rules, eh?"

We none of us spoke, but glared only.

"Now stay just as you are. I know all of you here, and you, none of you, move till I come back." Saying which he abruptly left the room.

No sooner gone was he than a chorus of conjecture arose as to the cause of this strange disappearance. Britain and I even forgot our enmity as we exchanged our conjectures, while the fellows on the cupboard thronged the floor with their questions. None of us, however, thought of flight: Warnerdugs was a law to us, based on the respect he had won from us.

"I know what he has gone up for," said Cartwright suddenly and with conviction.

"What then?" asked we all, sceptical.

"All right, disbelieve me then. But I know for all that. He's gone up for his gloves."

"Rot!" said Britain.

"How did you know he has gloves?" I asked.

"Seen them. He has shown me. And he has taught me boxing too."

And there came floating on my mind sundry advice he had called out to me as Britain and I had fought, couched in curiously professional language.

His words rang conviction, and immediately Britain and myself squared off again in an attitude of opposition, and the spectators rushed back to their rank. The affair was now going to be a matter of dignity and order.

Dignity and order, however, are seldom the parents of interest. Cartwright was accurate in his suggestion. Mr. Warner returned to the scene soon with gloves altogether too large for either Britain or myself, which we nevertheless were compelled to wear. But with their advent and the advent of all that they connoted, the whole proceeding was bled of reality. To be true, Mr. Warner did not interfere with our rough and tumble too much, his advice was impartial, and was given when we rested panting at each other, but it introduced formality, and formality is the death of vitality. We fought heavily, rather blunderingly. Whenever we rested from sheer exhaustion Mr. Warner asked us in turn if we gave the other best, an attempted seduction of manhood that was sturdily resisted. How long it lasted I have no conception. It seemed an eternity to me. At every renewal the gloves doubled their weight, and they finally were impossible to lift, so imponderable had they become. So Mr. Warner compelled us to shake hands, and dissolved the assembly, while each of us gathered to our adherents and proved conclusively that the issue had clearly gone against the other.

Yet the fight ended the matter for us. It did not bury the enmity: the nature of the case made that unlikely: but it made a renewal of hostilities improbable because both Britain and Pole withdrew all attempts, henceforward, to molest me or my friends—one of the results of which was that a regular gathering of devoted adherents grew around me.

It did not end the matter for others, however. For two or three days after the fight I noticed Mr. Pennell eyeing me closely. With him to eye closely was to eye malignly, and I could not imagine with what new vindictiveness he was about to honour me. I was not long to remain in ignorance. About a week after that he came in after supper was finished and said he wished to see me in his study

"Is it true you have been fighting, Elthorne?" he asked, as he faced me in his dimly-lit room.

"Fighting, sir?" I asked, with the usual attempt to gain time while my heart beat a rataplan on my ribs.

"Now don't attempt to prevaricate, sir!" he burst in mercilessly. "Don't add sin to sin!"

It was plain he knew much, though how much I could not say. I fell back on brevity. "Yes, sir!" I said.

"Who with?"

"I had rather not say."

"You shall say." He was a man devoid of all honour, or honourable instinct.

I remained silent.

"Was Mr. Warner there?"

The whole issue suddenly narrowed to a sharp point. It became tragic and intense. I had no time to think things out, and the whole situation seemed to me full of peril, and the only thing to be done seemed to me to deny all the possible danger.

"No, sir!" I said frankly, my face raised to his, like a champion of the innocent.

He took me by the shoulders at this, and shook me ferociously. I held my ground firmly: would not admit any of the questions he put to me, without respect to their truth or falseness. I would have lied with the best or worst, I have no doubt. But at that moment it was not my wish to lie. I was not untrue. I was holding to the higher truth, and wished only, as I firmly believe, to deny all implication in a dishonourable position. But Mr. Pennell was not the man to see this. In what he, no doubt, genuinely considered to be righteous, moral anger, but what was no more than splenetic rage in being baulked of the attempt to vent the unhealthy humours the years had gathered in his mind, he seized a heavy ruler off his desk, and, holding my left hand closed (always the left hand, for the disablement of the right meant a holiday) he struck on it again and again. To have cried out on an ordinary occasion would have been undesirable but permissible. On such an occasion of honour as this to have cried out would have been discreditable weakness, and I let no sound break from me, though the pain was intense, and the tears ran down my cheeks. To cry out, to yell with pain, was a recognised method of halving one's punishment with Mr. Pennell. I think he yearned for that yell. Consequently I was nearly in a state of collapse before he stayed his hand, and when he did so, he rated me soundly for having sullenness added to my numerous other wickednesses.

The fellows were sitting up in the dark waiting for me when

I entered our dormitory. I could not trust myself to speak, but lay on my bed moaning with the pain—which they thought great fun, till its continuance made them realise my pain was not a prank. Then they held an indignation meeting, and when I told them that I had been put “to Coventry” for lying and fighting they made a circle and, with many formulas, swore they would not regard the “Coventry,” that they would continue to speak to me though they were expelled for it.

The following morning I discovered that Britain’s knuckles were whole and sound as the result of a violent yell on the second blow, and that his “Coventry,” was only to be for a fortnight. But the chief thing that interested me was to discover how Mr. Warner had fared. A grip of his hand on my shoulder told me he knew the position of affairs. But I wanted to talk to him. The opportunity for this soon came. As it lay to him to enforce the decree of “Coventry” I was not permitted to walk with any of the fellows in our morning walk, so he broke his tale-telling, tale-hearing band and walked with me himself.

“You shouldn’t have lied, Elthorne,” said he.

“No, sir,” said I. Reproof from him was not a thing to be questioned.

“Still, you meant well, and that’s a great thing.”

Boy-like, I glowed with affection for him. Yet I wanted to know how he fared, and I did not like to ask him. It was not necessary.

“You see,” he went on, “he knew all the time. He and I had had it out already.”

“But how did he find out?”

“One of the chaps told Jim.” Jim was Mr. Pennell’s youngest son, a kind of general spy in the school.

“He’s a dirty little beast of a sneak.”

“Well, never mind him! Anyway, I am going at the end of this term.”

“Oh no, sir!” There was a ring of pain in my voice, and I looked up at him with large distress on my face.

“I should have been leaving next term in any case,” he continued resolutely, “because, you see, I have got my divinity examinations to go in for. So a term here or there doesn’t matter much.”

We walked on in silence for awhile. “Let’s talk of

something else," he said then, feeling, perhaps, that my emotions were heavily charged. So we talked of something else.

Then it burned on me that only the previous morning I had had a piece of news by the mail that transcended all incidental troubles.

"I say, sir," I burst out eagerly, "do you know that the mater and pater are coming home at Easter?"

"Yes, I did know!" he said.

For a moment or two the significance of the reply did not shine on me. Then I suddenly saw its strangeness.

"You knew?" I asked, looking up at him as he smiled down on me. When he smiled, his firm, somewhat protruding chin seemed to protrude yet more, with the result that his strong face never looked more strong than when he smiled.

"Your mother wrote and told me."

"I say, do you know the mater?"

"She wrote to me, and we have corresponded since."

Other things began to dawn on me.

"It wasn't through you we went to Uncle Jacob's at Christmas?"

"I don't know. I wrote and told your mother that you seemed likely to spend Christmas at school."

"Thanks awfully. It was brickish of you, sir!"

"Was it? I don't think so."

"But I say, how ripping to think you know the mater!"

The sun seemed to shine anew as we walked beside the sea. The earth was a good place after all. Even bandaged knuckles and the coming month of "Coventry" were forgotten. And with his familiar gesture Mr. Warner's hand came down and gripped my shoulder.

XI

HEAVY NEWS

When a schoolmaster employs the institution of "Coventry" against a boy he at once provides a test whereby his truth may be judged. Truly the institution is not his at all, it is one of the weapons of his craft : it was originally invented by the boys themselves, to be put into operation by themselves against one of themselves. There is a certain distinction and dignity about it that is supreme. It is like the withdrawing of hands from a polluted thing. The withdrawal of an interchange of words is not only a punishment, it is the refraining from contamination. Consequently it is seldom put into operation by the boys themselves, and when it is employed by them they are nearly inevitably right. There is a certain soul of honour in them that is a safe court of appeal in weighty issues, and even though they may err in fixing responsibility their sense of abhorrence or indulgence moves along right lines. Consequently if I heard of a schoolmaster who "put" a "Coventry" into operation against a boy that the boy's fellows refused to recognise, other things being equal I should be quite prepared to judge that schoolmaster as being unhealthily minded without meeting or knowing him.

For example, I cannot conceive of Mr. Warner "sending" a boy "to Coventry," and that edict not being recognised. Similarly I cannot conceive of Mr. Pennell making that edict with any effect. I only know of two occasions on which he did promulgate such an edict, and on each occasion the effect was to raise his victim in the eyes of his fellows. Certainly it was so with me. Under fear of his cruelty—the cruelty that rectangular, professed and avowedly rectangular, minds have always bathed in with delight—they were compelled to regard his edict when he was present, or when it was certain he would learn of it, as when his sons were present, but on all other occasions no difference was made in their attitude towards me, save that of increased respect. Even Mr. Pennell felt it, which is saying a very great deal. Once, on one of his customary prowls about the place, he came into the boot-room while some or other discussion was being hotly waged, and

in which I was taking part. Everybody feared him; but this seemed sunk for a moment as the whole room-full of boys turned and faced him. Fight and challenge were in the air. The moment was electric. So much so, indeed, that he turned and went out of the room as softly as he came. Nothing was ever said about it, but more than one noticed that for two or three days afterwards the maximum penalty of impots. came my way from him.

Consequently when one day as my term of imposed silence was drawing to a close Mr. Pennell entered the class room where I and others were befogging an Italian nobleman, who had undertaken to teach us French, with a myriad of cross questions, and said that he wished Elthorne major to go to his study and await him, a thrill of anxiety ran through most, a wonder as to what next evil had been devised for me. As I passed out Cartwright kicked my ankle for sympathy, and left a bruise that remained for weeks. Sundry others hit and punched at me, and I felt a rise of sympathy behind me.

To my surprise Mr. Pennell remained behind in the room while the Italian nobleman with an instinct of courtesy closed the door after me. As I remained a moment outside the door I heard Mr. Pennell start to address the class, and I felt it was a characteristic meanness on his part to attempt to prejudice my fellows against me before I had even heard of my sin.

In Mr. Pennell's study, to my considerable surprise, I found Frank, who had just arrived there. Apparently Mr. Pennell had adopted the same course with him as he had with me.

"What do you think he wants, Jack?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know, the beast! 'Tany rate he can't impot. me any more. I've got more on now than I can get through this term."

Presently "the beast" came in. He was fluttering a telegram in his hand, and a preternatural gravity gave an added harshness to his face. He placed his hand beneath his coat as he addressed himself to speech. His coat was always buttoned by its top button, and a characteristic gesture of his was to insert his hand just beneath this button, with the thumb showing on the outside over the button. It was with him a sign that he was on his dignity.

"Elthorne major and Elthorne minor," he began, "God

has been pleased to deliver you a blow." Having said this he looked from one to the other of us as though to impress on us the fact that no less an authority than God Himself had now joined him in the matter of blows. For ourselves, this uncanny beginning perturbed us but left us in the dark. As this was probably the effect he had wished to produce, he drew himself erect and went on with his half-threatening mystification. "You are young yet—the two of you,"—it is quite likely I may have bridled a little at the soft impeachment,—"very young. As you will find when you grow older, He never punishes us except for our good." This ancient tag broke the spell, and we began to fidget on our feet, and to look away from his gravely glittering eye. Then he waved the telegram at us. "I have just received this telegram from your aunt. You are, both of you, to go up to London at once. God has been pleased to take to Himself both your father and your mother."

If he had meant that his strange telling of the news should be as a buffer between us and its shock, he certainly was successful, for Frank and myself looked at one another dry-eyed and unmoved. Ordinarily the thing would have been inconceivable enough, but told as it was, in the way it was and by that erect, hard figure inevitably linked in our minds with cant speech and brutal despotism, it was like one of his rare jokes that always hurt somebody and left the rest uncomfortable. To have sniggered in his presence would have been unthinkable folly, in view of the pains it would have called on us. Except for that I think we would have sniggered.

The peaceful receipt of his dread news aroused his utmost indignation.

"Are you utterly shameless and unfeeling?" he said, turning on me with his hard eyes glittering in his anger. "Have you no natural love in you? This is terrible. I know no boy in this school, Elthorne major, that more needs the grace of God than you. I have tried, God knows; I have not spared you punishment. You have no conception of the truth; you are the ringleader of mischief in your dormitory, leading the other boys astray; you broil and fight; your work is always behindhand; and here, when God has been pleased to take from you both your parents in one blow, you stand there and face me as though it were the most ordinary

occurrence in the world. What is to be done with you, boy ? If He can't reach you, how is it to be expected that I will ? And you, Elthorne minor, I am afraid your brother's influence has corrupted you, but you are little better. How many lines have you to do ? "

" I don't know, sir."

" And how many hours in ? "

" I forget."

" There you are ! " He turned to me again. " You, I know, can have no time left to yourself for the rest of the term. I have even thought of having you put out of the team, but Jameson has persuaded me not to." My heart fell at this : Jameson, I may say, was the captain's name. " Well, it is useless my saying more at the moment. Go to your room, the two of you, and Mrs. Pennell will come and pray with you."

Surprised, and relieved, to think that we were to be let off with so short an interview, we went upstairs to the cold bedroom more like the victims of punishment than the recipients of sympathy. The chief matter that occupied my thought was not the sorrow that had come to me, that seemed strangely remote and unreal, but rather the few hard words with which Mr. Pennell had touched upon my delinquencies. It struck the raw, and left it smarting, to be told that I was not truthful. There was colour for the remark, as I know : there was something not straightforward about me, something that preferred the turning of a flank to a frontal attack, until the moment when my temper and doggedness were aroused ; and this, I know, this sensitiveness as I felt it to be, often appeared as a falsehood, although my very being cried out that it was not wrong, that it was a thing that might work wrong or work right, but in itself was a thing not undesirable. And then his reference to me as the ringleader of the dormitory ! I certainly was emphatically its leader, but how did he know ?

In fact, both my self-conceit and my desire for a privacy in leadership had been struck, and I sat on the edge of my bed exchanging one bitter thought for another. Then it flashed on me suddenly that, whatever Mr. Pennell did or did not mean by his enigmatical talk, this much seemed clear, that neither father nor mother would be able to come home as they

had promised to do. It brought my galloping thought up-standing as with a lasso.

"I say, minor!" I said.

"Hullo!"

"That means that neither the mater nor the pater will be able to come home."

A long silence followed this unpalatable, but seemingly undeniable, fact. Then Frank spoke.

"I say, Jack, do you think the old beast was getting at us?"

"He is a fair beast!"

"He's a fathead!"

Still the thing seemed as remote as ever, despite that recognition of the one outstanding, unpleasant feature. How much nearer we should have got to it cannot be told, for shortly afterwards Mrs. Pennell appeared on the scene. She fondled us, she commiserated with us, she wept over us, and she prayed for us. Finally by one means and another she reduced us to so lachrymose a condition that we dared not look at one another for very shame. Yet not one of our simpers was for grief, or because we had come to a realisation of our loss. It was merely that Mrs. Pennell had, by her various assaults on our emotions, thoroughly depressed our vitality. At any rate, when she left us presently, we were whimpering and indignant as she was pleased and triumphant.

In the afternoon of that day as we stood in the hall while the porter brought down our boxes, one or two of the fellows passed us on their way upstairs, and they looked at us so oddly and so strangely that we felt more and more as though we had done some felony. We began to feel thoroughly uncomfortable, and of nothing so desirous as the fresh air and the sunshine. Just as we were going out, as we stood in the doorway, and Mrs. Pennell, her offices completed, had returned to domestic management, I heard a clatter of feet down the stairs, and before I could turn about to see who it was, a hand fell upon my shoulder and a voice in my ear said:

"I have just got the old moke to let me out for a shake. I say, you know, I'm jolly sorry, and all that kind of thing. It's a beastly shame, isn't it? Hope the moke didn't preach you about it. Bet he did though! But I say, you're coming back, aren't you?"

It was Ransome, impulsive Ransome. He made me feel human again.

"Rather! 'Tany rate, I suppose so."

"I say, rotten if you don't."

"Rotten isn't in it."

"Look here, I say, I've got to cut back now, old man, or the moke'll begin to sniff. Write us!"

"Rather!"

From half-way up the stairs he stopped to call back:

"And, you know, I'm beastly sorry."

His bullet head looked over his thin shoulders for a moment, then his bony legs sped up the stairs again two at a time. And, as he went, for the first time a sense of our loss struck me like a buffet of wind across my face. Yet it was not till we sat in the train, as it sped towards London, that we first truly realised the significance of the news that had so upturned the order of things for us.

The afternoon was a dull one, and the low windows of the carriage diminished yet further the light that was abroad. The carriage was dirty, the upholstery was dim and faded, and the smell was stuffy and noxious. Presently there came a gleam of sunshine that flashed across the carriage. Immediately, by some unaccountable fitting-in of things, my mind went over the years. I smelt the same stuffy cushions, I saw the same ray of sunshine, I realised the same depressing carriage, I saw Frank and myself sitting as we sat before; but with it all I saw the figure of mother sitting as she sat then, so sweetly troubled and responsible, gently protesting at our uproar as though she knew so much better than we the sorrow that was in store for us all in that hour of our first parting. I drew in my breath sharply, so identical did the scene seem, and so vivid was the memory. Then it flashed on me that the figure, so anxious and lovable and pretty, was never to be seen again. I bit on my lips again and again, but it was no use. Like a sudden storm a torrent of tears broke from me, and I hid my face in my arm on the window-ledge.

Quickly Frank was at my side. "I say, Jack!" was all he said.

I think there must have been something like horror of realisation as I said to him:

"Mother! We shall never see mother again as she was here that day!"

Certainly his answering look to mine was one of horror.

"Nor father," said he, which was characteristic. And we both fought against our tears, without any too great success.

We were red-eyed when we reached London, and shrank from venturing out on to the platform of the station. Aunt Mary met us, and never before have I known her so warm-hearted and kind.

"You poor boys," was all she said, as she found us and took us to the cab.

That evening we learnt that on the previous evening, after dinner—it startled us to think the time was so near, the distance being so far—father had been stricken down with cholera, so the brief cablegram ran, and mother even as she nursed him had caught it too, with the result that the following morning—the very morning of the day we were on, so strange it seemed—they had both been buried. I, as the elder, had the cablegram handed to me, and I fingered it with a strange sense of awe and responsibility. There was something about the very way in which both Uncle Jacob and Aunt Mary addressed me that made me feel as though I were no more a schoolboy but a person of some responsibility and account. So much so, indeed, that I choked down my tears, and asked a number of questions, which were no doubt ridiculously inapplicable to the circumstances, but which were useful inasmuch as they declared my right to ask them.

How little we know how one circumstance not only leads to, but positively makes, another. To-day's exultation may be the very cause of to-morrow's lamentation. The catastrophe that lays the earth in ruins at our feet may be the very agent of the fairer structure that shall succeed. I believe it was that very assertion, that proud and, what I fear will be called, bumptious assertion of myself that put a thought into my uncle's head that was to change the whole course of my life. I know the following day I saw him and Aunt Mary in very earnest conversation together, a conversation that was punctuated by repeated glances at me where I sat, as they thought, intently reading. All my curiosity was at once awake. I could catch a thought that floated in the air more

quickly than most, at all times of my life. I was not introspective enough at that time of life to analyse myself, and therefore I will not obtrude an analysis now. Yet I knew that something important was being discussed as regards myself, and I was irritable and distressed to know what it was. I watched everything keenly, and noticed that the following two days two telegrams arrived. That is to say, they were brought in in the ordinary way as telegrams, but I saw that the colour of the envelopes was different, that they were similar to that which had conveyed the cablegram I had seen. And I wondered what further news had come from Colombo. I wondered, too, when we were going back to school.

Also, both Frank and myself began to realise the meaning of the loss that had come to us. There was a harrowing, indeed, from the conscious atmosphere of mourning that pervaded the house, an atmosphere that was materially affected by the copious black with which Aunt Mary decked herself, and the black bands with which our arms, hats and necks were bound; but our realisation of tremendous loss was quite independent of, ran by the side of, the effect this pageant had on us. One depressed us, the other made us feel blind and groping and pathetically helpless. This, joined to the uncertainty of what was being discussed, produced in me a sense of strain during the following few days that could scarcely be borne.

Yet I was not long to remain ignorant of the talk concerning me. Before a week was full, and after Frank and I had repeatedly expressed each to the other our yearning to get back to school, impots. and all, one evening after dinner Uncle Jacob called me into his study. I went, knowing that something critical was being breathed, and with Frank's merciless pinch on my arm to wish me success whatever the matter was.

Uncle Jacob's study was a room built out from the house into the vegetable garden. It had double windows and double doors, and all appliances necessary to shutting out noise. A thick carpet over all the floor maintained the silence he had so won. It was a large room, and two sides of it were stacked with books from the floor to the ceiling. A third side, where the grate stood, was hung with original sketches

and paintings, while the fourth side was almost a continuous array of windows. It was on this side he had his desk, with tables of the same height on each side of it strewn with various drawings and designs.

On a flash I saw it all unforgettably as he opened the door and signed to me to enter. I had only been in it once before : on our first visit to London. Then I had thought upon its luxury, and felt on the whole somewhat contemptuously towards it and its owner. How different the thing had become ! Now there was no father to stir such contempt by his fine, debonair defiance of the slightly bent figure with the richly coloured cheeks and flashing eyes. Now I had been passed under the power of that irritably dominant will—dominant by reason of its own strength and also because of the hazard of a superior position. I was afraid of him, and that great, comfortable room loomed before me with an aspect almost sinister.

There was also an active reason for this. As Uncle Jacob opened the door and signed to me to pass him, I felt on an immediate instinct that a change had come over him. It was not till we were both well inside the room that I felt this strongly enough to give a name to it. As he stood by the fire I saw that I had not to deal with a man, but a machine. His black hair and beard were now grey. His smirking smile, that had once looked as though its owner sought for favour, was now hard, conscious of its strength, and, as the lower jaw drew down pulling the cheek with it, actually cynical at times. His hands fidgeted with papers on the mantelpiece ; his eyes as they sought mine flashed with fire, out of which a strange look of benevolence sometimes came—a something that one called benevolence in spite of a strong instinct that it was not so ; a benevolence, if benevolence, that lurked on the borders of spitefulness, to smite with the latter if the former failed to lure. As he looked on me, I felt almost as though he had subdued my will to his, sought to employ my personality in his favour, actually before he spoke a word. All the week he had treated me kindly as a nephew. He had even taken notice of me, which he did not usually do. Then he had seemed like a kindly, certainly well-intentioned if decidedly irritable, old man. Now he seemed like a falcon. He had taken up his business attitude. Previously he had treated me like a human

being, now he was about to treat me like one of his clerks.

"Well, Jack, now we have to think about you, eh?" So he began, looking quickly at me, and then looking back again on the papers that he fingered.

I made no reply. What reply was there for me to make?

"I have cabled to Ceylon," he continued, "and I learn that your aunt and myself have been appointed executors for your father's will, with the trust of your brother and yourself. The sum of money for that purpose (your father was not, I fear, much of a thrifty man: still!) should provide two or three years longer at school for Frank, with his keep for that time, and some of yours, maybe, too. These are details that you probably will not very well understand; still, as they are important, you may as well be told them."

He said this in a deprecatory manner, as though to tell me what he at the same time withdrew from me. I had no means of contradicting him, and so had to accept what he said, thinking hard all the time as to what the upshot of all this should be. Having allowed sufficient time for the effect of his indulgence to pass and be forgotten, he proceeded:

"Now there is yourself! Have you thought what you would like to be?"

Poor me! I did not at that time understand the significance of foregone conclusions, so I said eagerly:

"Yes, I should like to be an orator!"

Uncle Jacob looked at me with wide eyes for a moment. Then he snapped:

"What do you mean?"

The tone of his voice made me feel a good deal less certain of my choice. But I did not give in. I put as much truculency into my voice as I replied.

"I should like to speak. I should like to influence people."

Either what I said, or the attempted note of assertion, irritated the old man, for I saw his beautifully pink cheeks turn a fierce red at the cheek-bones.

"Don't be a fool, boy!" he broke out. "And when you speak, do so more respectfully."

It was not what he said, but something about his way of saying it cowed me. It was as though virtue had gone out of

me. A long silence ensued ; as I had nothing to say, he went on :

“ What kind of a calling is that : an orator ? My boy, you don’t think. What do you mean by being an orator ? ”

It was for him, I thought, to help me out with the interpretation of my ambition in terms of modern society. All I knew was that in my day-dreams, and in my fancies as I lay awake in bed, mingling with scenes of football fields where I was the hero of both sides, there had come vivid pictures of myself holding an audience spellbound with a power of words, where the eloquence swept a host off its feet while my chain of reasoning convinced them that it was proper so to be swept. What it was I said, or what were the subjects on which I discoursed, I did not know. What did such trifles matter ? The great thing was the speaking, not the subject one spoke upon. I remembered once or twice defending or denouncing great criminals according to the effect their personality had on me. But these were of little consequence. I even knew my gestures where I did not know my subject. And how was I to tell all this to Uncle Jacob ? I doubt if I could even have told them to mother, had she lived. So I merely murmured inarticulately about “ my ambition,” and “ swaying people,” with other disjointed phrases of that ilk.

Then Uncle Jacob smiled ; and his smile was worse than his irritation, for there was a triumph almost malicious in it.

“ You don’t know, Jack, what it is you do want,” he said.

Having crushed my mind by the weight of his, he went on with timeworn phrases. “ When people, especially boys, don’t know what they want, they need other people, wiser than they, to make up their minds for them.” At this sally of his, his eyes smiled maliciously, while his jaw dropped and moved forward in an odd manner of ratchet movement, as though he would not make too much of his own joke, it being a little obvious. “ Don’t you think so ? ”

I could feel him forcing me to say yes : so I said it.

“ I am glad you agree with me, laddie, because, though the responsibility of your care is now in my hands, I would not like to do anything against your will. You will be surprised to hear that your Aunt Mary and myself have already discussed this question. We have decided that the best thing for you is that you should come into my own business for a

short time, in order to gain some business experience. Then I should have you under my own care, and you would be learning as well as making yourself useful. Now, don't you think that a good idea?"

I felt just as though I had been thrown into a cold pond with all my clothes on: cold, clammy, helpless and half-terrified. He stood there, looking at me to increase my feeling of helplessness.

Then a horrible thought struck me. "Not now?" I said.

"Well, since you have decided, the sooner the better."

"Shan't I go back to school?"

"In any case, that's out of the question."

"Rotten!"

"What do you say?"

"I want to go back to school, uncle."

Uncle Jacob's eyes hardened a little, and his jaw dropped, at this. He looked at me for a moment or two, then replied:

"What is being decided is for the very best." He waited a further moment or two, then went on: "I'll take you down myself in a few days, but you need not start regularly till Monday week. Frank will go back to school before then."

Not much more was said, and I remember stepping out of that soft carpeted room into the long passage that led back to the main building with an utter feeling of loneliness, such as even the mingled emotions of resentment against, and fear of, Uncle Jacob could not displace. The passage was dark, and I felt as though I were walking along a gloomy channel of eternal tears. Even those daydreams in which I imagined myself as the inspired leader of throngs failed to come at my bidding to succour me. Not knowing why, a nameless horror of working under Uncle Jacob came upon me. It only weighed me down hopelessly. There was only Frank I could turn to. He was the sole thing left to me, and it was salutary that I should have to discipline myself in order to be able to address him in the recognised code of speech. I found him in the dining-room, drawing.

"Hallo! What are you at? You're always messing about drawing things." As I spoke I flung myself into a big chair.

"What had Uncle Jacob got to say? And don't talk so much."

"He's just about as big a pig as Bertie. Worse, because he does call himself an uncle, and t'other chap is only a moke."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm not to go back to school."

"Oh, I say!" There was a wail of trouble in his voice.

"I've got to go into his business, straight off."

"He's a beast."

So we had tried to commiserate with one another. And so we faced the situation with words. But it was not to be put off with words.

ACT II

LOVE AND LIFE

I

THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING MY FEET

Thus at the wise age of fifteen summers I undertook the mature business of helping to earn my living. I wasted my time at school. Mr Pennell had not the remotest idea as to what education was—though in that, to be true, his ignorance was ably assisted by the majority of schoolmasters in England. Within two years, all I had ever been told was utterly forgotten. I remember the very word “logarithms” puzzling me when I read it in a paper, and only when I turned it up in an encyclopædia did I recollect that for nearly three weary terms it had been the terror of my thoughts. I do not so much mind that, but there is one matter that has often caused me bitterness. For Virgil, beyond the idle memory of his name, became completely effaced, and I have never had time in my life to recover the lost key to that world of magical speech. I had even enjoyed him at school, which is to say much, for the rich cates of his poetry had been made as nearly like brickbats as was possible. All I knew of Greek was the hideous memory of wandering for ever in the interminable labyrinth of the verb, with Mr. Pennell’s detestable figure at every bend to make confusion worse confounded. German, too, vanished, the only memory being of wandering with a vague sense of discomfort down a long alley of a sentence in the dim hope of finding a verb that should make all things plain. It was

French I chiefly remembered, and that, I believe, was because the impecunious foreign nobleman who bore the charge of teaching us this language had not as yet fallen into the English methods of mystification. Our lessons with him were not lessons in the ordinary meaning of the word. They were romps, in which we would help him out with his English almost as much as he would help us out with our French. The result was that we did not learn, we achieved, and we not only achieved, but we became familiar, even to the extent of knowing quite naturally some of the most elliptical idioms.

Had only our work-hours been affected, the trouble might not have been so grievous. Our whole days had been affected by this incubus. Because our healthy minds ejected with scorn and loathing the whole masses of undigested matter poured into them, impositions were showered on us for having failed in our duty. Because our healthy bodies were irked by the unnatural restraint imposed on them, further impositions were scattered abroad. Beyond the first three weeks of a term I had never known what it was to have a moment unfettered by impositions. It was with the utmost difficulty that our captain could manage to maintain inviolate our football practice. It must have seemed comic to an outsider (it assuredly was not comic to us), to see our leisure hours slipping away, slipping away, under a gathering accumulation of impositions, an accumulation the first start of which began with the first day of school. It was, we knew, of no avail trying to reduce the pile. It would, in any case, gather more quickly than we could reduce it ; and by an inviolable code, each term was reckoned as closing its account with itself.

The only true education I remember meeting was the making of one or two worthy friends and, above all, Mr. Warner, and the memory of him. All the rest was chiefly waste, though by no means agreeable waste, which is the only sort of waste that is tolerable. Yet I think that the waste of those years is not comparable with the sheer wastage of the years that followed. During the two days after Frank left for school, I was so utterly miserable and disconsolate that I was only too glad when the following Monday morning came round, and I was led up by Uncle Jacob to business. He had large warehouses in Thames Street at the back of Queen Victoria Street, at which offices he presented himself daily with unfailing

regularity not later than nine o'clock of a morning. All the way up in the train he neglected his daily paper in order to get my nerves into a jangle by informing me of the responsibility and importance of the step I was about to take. He continued this even as we walked through the great swinging doors into the artistically decorated vestibule showroom. Then he flew into a towering rage because the clerk who had the charge of it could not be found. A little, pale, elderly man, with a moustache nearly as large as his jaw hiding half his face, appeared at this, and sought to mollify him.

"But where is Tozer?" Uncle Jacob asked in a half-scream of anger, his face even to his forehead flushing hot-red.

"I don't think he's up yet," faltered the little man, in a very paroxysm of fear. "I'll go and see, sir."

"Don't be a fool, Tonson!" The little man, who was preparing to leave the stricken field, was held back by this. Uncle Jacob looked on him as though he would have struck him. The little man's state was pitiable to see. Having held him thus, Uncle Jacob then went on: "Not up yet? What do you mean?"

As this was clearly a difficult question, the little man merely said:

"Yes, sir!"

"Why isn't he up?"

"It's—it's not yet nine, sir!" The little man pulled out his watch as he spoke, as it were in corroboration, in spite of the fact that a large ornamented timepiece hung on the wall over our heads. Moreover, a hard, red line across his forehead was evidence of the fact that he himself had barely arrived.

"Not nine yet! What has that got to do with it? If I can be here by five to nine, can't my staff do the same?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Yes, sir! You are a fool, Tonson."

How long this unprofitable dialogue would have continued if left to itself, I cannot say. The little man was getting ashier and ashier of hue, the perspiration standing on his forehead, while Uncle Jacob was getting redder and redder. It was as though one were feeding on the other. But at that moment, Tozer, the subject of discussion, walked in.

He was a tall, shock-headed, red-haired boy, with a complexion like a girl's, and a nose thrust forward at one, as it

were, in continual contempt, showing the nostrils. He was like a Gael, and was in fact a Gael, dropped unceremoniously into an orderly London business world, giving it the lie in every one of his gestures full of health. His tweed suiting suggested heather ; and his silk orange tie had been crookedly pulled up with a scant respect for the City of London. He was about four years my senior, and was loose of limb but easy and swinging of gait.

"You're late, Tozer," said Mr. Tonson with a sudden revival of authority, and an accompanying slight revival of colour.

"I'm not," said Tozer peacefully, secure in the knowledge of his right, pulling out his timepiece, and looking up at the clock, in double confirmation of it. It was addressed, however, not to Mr. Tonson, but to Uncle Jacob.

"Dear, dear me ! No rule and discipline in this place at all." Saying which, Uncle Jacob plunged off on the way upstairs to his room, leaving us, a group of three, neither of whom had any conception of the next thing to do. As he disappeared through the door leading to the stairs, the memory of us seemed to strike him, when he turned about and as quickly came back again. "What are you wanting here ?" he said at once to Mr. Tonson in a voice full of righteous indignation, as though that little man had of set design sought to waste his time.

"Nothing, sir !" replied Tonson, very distressed and worried.

"Then, for goodness' sake, haven't I got enough to do——?"

What the new crescendo was that was a-wing cannot be said, for its cause was happily removed by Mr. Tonson hurrying from the room in great fear. Whereupon Uncle Jacob, as suddenly forgetting him, turned to Tozer and said :

"Tozer, this is my nephew, Jacob Elthorne. Find him something to do about the showroom for to-day, while I think of a department for him."

No sooner had Uncle Jacob gone than my tawny guardian bore me across the room, and, opening a large parcel that leant against the wall there, displayed before me a sketch finished in great detail.

"What do you think of that, eh ?" he asked me, with a note of triumph ringing in his voice.

"Looks like a fireplace," I ventured.

"It is a fireplace." There was rebuke as well as triumph in my tawny friend's voice.

"Yours, I suppose," I said, affecting great unconcern in my voice, as though I were in the confirmed habit of meeting artists.

"Mine! Good heavens, I wish it were! I can't draw for nuts." And he stood back and gazed on it approvingly, his head a little to one side.

This frank avowal made it difficult for me to understand his strange enthusiasm, but it left the field open for a frank expression of my opinion.

"I say, it has got to be a decent-sized room to take it."

"Yes," came his slow, deliberate answer, as though even so much of a disparagement of his idol was to be deplored. "But then, you see, it's not to be a cheap thing."

"But if people had a room large enough to take that, don't you think it would be ever so much better to have one of those fireplaces you can get right inside of? They are ever so much jollier, I think."

"But you mustn't say that."

It took me a short while to understand the full meaning of his sudden expostulation. Then I said:

"Why ever not?"

"This is by one of the boss' favourite artists."

"Oh!" I said. The news left me cold, but it certainly distressed me considerably to find that the fear with which Uncle Jacob had imbued me some ten days previously, was the general state of affairs here, and in twice as acute a form. It drove foreboding into my thought. Moreover, the terror produced by that sudden rage of his, perplexed and baffled me. I had seen him attempt them at Hampstead, but then Aunt Mary would immediately withdraw everybody from him, and a lusty fury in an empty room is a tiresome proceeding at best. Up in Thames Street they seemed to sweep through the building like a tempest. It did not occur to me then that in Thames Street men were dependent on his whim for bread and butter, whereas at Hampstead they were independent of him. The law had imposed certain arbitrary obligations in the one case that it had declined in the other.

While Tozer was showing me various matters of interest

about the place, Mr. Tonson burst in. His face was pale, his manner was energetic, and there was evidently some trouble about.

"What do you mean by being late this morning?" This he threw out at Tozer before he reached him, as a kind of advance-guard, while he followed it up in person as with heavy cavalry.

Tozer wheeled round to meet him. "I wasn't late," he said, "and I told you so."

"In a most insolent way, too."

"Insolent! I like that."

Tozer looked even more tawny as he stood long and large in rebuttal of this charge. But Mr. Tonson was the most interesting figure. He had no presence and was of little significance. But what he lacked in substance he endeavoured to make good in vehemence. It was quite obvious even to me, an outsider, that he imitated Uncle Jacob. What Uncle Jacob wrought on him, he sought to wreak on those beneath him. The print of the man he imitated was large all over him, and those under the direction must have suffered a continually unhappy time, I thought. But he did not seem to have much effect on the tawny one.

"Don't answer back," he cried.

"Then what do you ask me questions for?"

"I shall report you to Mr. Mueller."

"Oh, don't be silly!"

Unprofitable, and therefore endless, dialogues seemed to be much in favour in the firm of Jacob Mueller, Ltd., as far as I could gather. They seemed to go on, with short pauses between question and answer for the further accumulation of venom, till something quite exterior to them rudely interrupted them. That something on this occasion was the ringing of a small telephone in a corner of the room.

"That's the boss," said Tozer as he sprang to answer it.

After a short colloquy at it he turned and said to Mr. Tonson: "He wants you, and he's in a frightful paddy about something, so you'd better look out."

The transformation in Mr. Tonson was pitiable to see. All his pugnacity vanished with such colour as the years had left to him. He looked right and left nervously, as though expecting someone to leap out on him. He was like a bladder caught

in the very attempt to swell to twice its fit size, and pricked to flatness. Then he hurried off to get some papers for his interview with Uncle Jacob.

Although Uncle Jacob's discourse to me in the train had irritated and wearied me (an effect he never failed to achieve), it had none the less influenced me, apparently. At least, I know that when, later in the day, some kind of regular task was apportioned me, I was chagrined beyond measure to find that it consisted of addressing envelopes, attaching stamps to those whose distance won them that distinction, and delivering the rest myself. Time-worn maxims about the responsibility of little things would only have angered me the more as, under the direction of the youth whom my coming was to release from that odiously little task, I addressed, sorted, stamped, and arranged for delivery the following morning the correspondence and the invoices as they began slowly to filter through in the early afternoon.

"This part o' the job ain't much, I will say," explained my instructor. "Sticking stamps is no job for no one. But you wait till the morning comes!"

"Oh!" I said non-committally, half in youthful loftiness, half with my imagination far afield in scenes where I was the digit to events, not a mere cypher delivering letters.

"Yus! Not that I won't say on a wet day it's rotten, but on a fine day to be able to go out and fool about's a bit of all right. A good mike just suits your 'umble, that I will say!"

This pellucid explanation of the joys of my task affected me little. A "mike" is an excellent and admirable thing, as all will agree, and it would have just suited me no less than it suited Tim Larkin, whom I was to replace and uplift to better things. But at the moment I was chiefly impressed with the thought of making a figure in the world. Even the wish to return to school had been burnt away in that flame. The idea of an office was but a very frail second best to the moving spectacle that lay under the eye of an orator. But even it could yield importance. And it was for importance I lusted. I grudged every minute sorting letters. I was willing to toil early and late, to spend and be spent, had I prodigious responsibilities on my shoulders, and great things flowing from my every decision. Some subtle wand had struck me, and the boy who had burned to be first in the football field, and then to

efface himself in the knowledge of his own greatness, had become the boy who yearned to be first in the City of London. I was but little conscious of this at the time : it was less evident in itself than in the distaste it created in me of the work in hand, and I was still dreaming over other things when Tim Larkin again broke in on me.

"No peachin'," he said, looking round at me.

"I'm not a sneak," I repudiated hotly.

"Not you !" he said, quizzing round at me sharply. "Still, you know, you're something to do with the boss, and I will say—. Well, what about the stamping ?" There was such an adroit, yet profound, implication in his pause awhile, and rapid change of subject, that I began to observe him a little more closely. His flaming-red hair was cropped quite close, and gave to his round, small head something of the urgency of a cannon ball. His mouth was small, it might even have been considered delicate except that when he smiled (and when he was not smiling he seemed as though he were about to do so) he pursed it up, giving him a remarkably rat-like look—an effect to which he added by screwing up his eyes. He was freely freckled, but unlike most people who are freckled, his cheeks were rosy-red. There was something quite kindly about him ; something, too, quite unaccountably shrewd. This was added to by the fact that both his coat and waist-coat were much too large for him.

He had said nothing, but as he turned quickly away and ran a long line of stamps along the wetter, I found myself blushing hotly. The memory of our hatred of Pennell minor because he had been intelligence department to his father, seized on me, for I thought that I was like to be considered the same here. At all costs it was necessary for me to clear myself of any possible implication. So I broke out impetuously :

"I say, you needn't think I love the boss any more than you do. If you're thinking that, you're jolly well mistaken."

"I don't s'pose," was all he said, as, with a deftness that seemed to me incredible, he laid down his line of stamps on a row of envelopes he had already formed out, and broke away each envelope with its stamp from the rest.

I certainly understood this reply to suggest doubt of my sincerity, and was correspondingly reserved with him and dissatisfied with myself. Either I did him an injustice, or the

night gave him confidence, for the following morning he greeted me warmly.

"What oh, here we are!" said he. "Nab hold of those envelopes, and let's nip out before the jackdaw gets a sight of us."

The jackdaw was Mr. Tonson, and I did as he bade me, although I did not realise the perils of letting him get a sight of us. Larkin explained, however, as he hurried us out of the house.

"The jackdaw's a fair cop for dropping work on you. And he does nothing himself only fuss. I copy my elders in that, I do—barring the fuss, as I will say. He's a sort of tin god on wheels, is the jackdaw, except when the boss wants him, and then he looks as if he'd bin through a mangle. What do you think of the Highland Sodger?"

"Who is the Highland Sodger?" I asked. Certainly I began to find something lovable about Larkin.

"Ole fuzzy out in the shop!"

"Oh! Tozer?"

"Yus; and what a name to be struck on! He had to dance me round, like I'm dancing you. Laugh! I fair split. Why I knew the whole journey first round; I ain't a mug, but I made him trot me round for more'n a fortnet, till he nearly got ill on me, he was so savage. Don't think he knew the round himself at the end o' it, he got so tied up explaining it to me."

The very conjunction of Tozer and Larkin made me see the humourlessness of the former vividly.

"He ain't meant for London: not chaps like the Highland Sodger. He's the sort that ort t' be lookin' after sheep." All this eager confidence was being given me, as we threaded in and out of buildings, and through bewildering short cuts, delivering letters. "But he's all right, if he doesn't trip over himself! Smoke?"

This sudden question made me turn round to see him produce an enormous briar pipe from his pocket, which he proceeded to fill with shag tobacco. Presently clouds of smoke were emerging from his pipe, his nose and his mouth.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked, seeing me wreathed in smiles at the picture of him. With that pipe he looked as if he might have been any age.

"You look such an odd fish with that pipe."

"I'll have to chuck it after this week of a morning, I s'pose. Still— Have a fag?"

"I haven't started properly yet, but I may as well." At this he produced a well-stocked cigarette case, which seemed perplexingly incongruous with his none-too-clean collar and his suit that looked as if it had been handed down to him by a previous wearer of larger build. "No, I won't though."

"Why, what's up? Make you ill?"

"Rot! But I'm not going to smoke just because you are, in a sort of follow-my-leader way. Not much!"

"That's why most people do."

"Do they?"

"I don't care, I may say. Fags cost cash, and the old sweep's none too free with his dibs."

"How much do you earn?"

"Eight bob a week."

"It's not much, is it?"

"It's more'n I earn, anyhow."

This sudden candour silenced me, which evidently made him feel there was something to explain.

"I give chaps what they give me, and that's my religion, that is, as I may say. Now if the old sweep'd come down 'andsome and give me a quid a week, I'd see he didn't lose for it. But eight bob a week!—that's no cop for no one, that isn't. So I take care he loses on it. Me with a mother, too!"

"What about your father?"

"Dead!"

"I say, you don't mean you both live on eight bob a week."

"Something like it—with a bit o' sewin'."

"I say, that's absolutely rotten. I think Uncle Jacob's a swine to let a thing like that be." I had no conception of what living on that sum might mean; I only knew that I had been promised it as my wage, and that it had to pay for ties, collars, gloves, fares and luxuries—in the terms of Aunt Mary's careful category. I know I was in flaming anger, little though I realised its meaning, at the thought of Larkin and his mother living so while Uncle Jacob could maintain the state and splendour he did.

"What oh!" sang Larkin. "What price chestnuts!" And he put up both hands as though to warm them at my face.

"But it's not fair," I said, brushing his hands away, for passers-by were beginning to take note of us.

"Let's go and have something to eat." So he said, though there was no need of much "going" to be done, seeing it was a distinctly dirty Italian shop opposite us that had raised the thought in his mind.

"I'll pay!" I said, feeling very large and important, and possibly not a little philanthropic also.

"Rather!" said he. "Won't you? I don't s'pose."

That night as we sat at dinner at Hampstead dim and vague thoughts concerning the complete artistic comfort surrounding us floated through my mind. But they soon floated away.

II

LIFE IS READY TO TAKE SHAPE

In this way three years passed. It was in fact they who passed, for I stood still. Things about me, and even on me, changed truly enough: that is to say, for instance, my speech passed in tone from the treble to the bass (to my infinite satisfaction), and in temper from the inquisitive to the pert; my clothes changed from the boyish-careless to the dandiacal and complete; my airs changed from the ingenuous to the assertive; and so forth. But so far as any true growth in me, any growth in spiritual significance, was concerned, I stood at nineteen as I had stood at sixteen, and thus my early years in the City were even more of a waste than my fruitless years under Mr. Pennell—for there, at least, Nature had in some sort had its way. There had intervened no change in spiritual import; what change there was, was merely a matter of geographical alteration.

Certainly there was this geographical alteration, and chiefly

in my environment. For example, the City has at last conquered the tawny Tozer. The tweeds of freedom and healthy odour had gone down the winds of yesterday, and he now wore each and all of the official badges of serfdom—immaculate white collar, well-creased trousers, black tail-coat and silk hat. He still, it should be said, had the decency to look out of place in them, but that would pass, and he would become one of the herd. His showroom had passed out of his hands, but he bore with him his precious sketches to make a separate department for their care. I myself, through an insatiable restlessness, alike at the control of others and at tasks that I thought to be petty and unimportant, had managed to reach a small department that had the great advantage of bringing me into touch with most of the artists that designed for the firm. This task pleased me as much as anything, inasmuch as it compelled me to treat as equal in age men who were vastly my senior, and as equal in position those whose skill in design had made their names appear often in the glory of print.

It is easy, very easy, to scoff at, or to snub, young men who are called bumptious upstarts. Honestly and truly I may say that whatever I took in hand to do I did well, at that time. I may have readily tired of it, but this was only because I had not found the thing that was to me more than myself, and to which all my powers were therefore due. I made very few friends, I know: scarce any, indeed. Larkin, by a transposition, had become my assistant, my sole assistant, in my department, and with him I fraternised because he was strange and odd, and devoted to me. Beyond him, I do not think there was one to whom I unfolded my thoughts. I had friends of a sort; fellows of my own age, with whom I used to smoke and talk and eye girls of an evening along the Heath Road, but as I look back I can but vaguely recall their faces, I cannot recall their names, and they drop out of all significance in the lot of my days.

Periodically I was lectured by Aunt Mary because of what she termed my bumptiousness. Her complexion was now parchment-pale, her face was thin, but there was a high masterfulness in it that made me fear her, and keen to get away from her. Indeed, everyone in the house feared her, including Uncle Jacob.

"One would think, to see the way you behave, that you owned the whole earth." If she had said this to me once, she had said it a score of times, and I was weary of it. I knew there was truth in it, yet I knew it was mainly wrong. I wished to fill a place, it was true, and was it not right that I should? Did I wish the conditions of that place to be mitigated for me? Then what was the use of speaking so? "And you'll please to understand," she would continue, "that you don't own the whole earth. I want a few less sour looks when you are asked to do something you don't like. You're not going to have things all your own way in life, and don't you think you are."

It is unnecessary for me to retail further excerpts from her regular diatribes. They are of a sort only too familiar. I knew she was wrong, and often I would go away muttering to myself, in a habit of soliloquy that (let your wiseacre dramatic critics say what they will) I have always had, in common with many, many men:

"Just because she wants *her* way, and can't get it, she calls me bumptious. And just because I want *my* way, she calls me an upstart. Why can't I have my way as well as she? What's she more than I, I'd like to know, except a cantankerous old cat that has learnt the trick of sitting on Uncle Jacob? I *shall* have my way, if we fight all the week for it."

I was more right than I myself knew. For I have since observed that if an elder calls a younger bumptious, that elder was nearly inevitably just like that younger at his own age. And if two of an age exchange that term, then they attest their remarkable similarity in that fact. It is only the pushful that are termed bumptious, and it is only the pushful who think of employing the term. There need be no opprobrium on either side, but what opprobrium there be, is not on one side more than on the other. And this irrespective of age. There can only be one test, that of adequacy. If a man be adequate to lead, he is worthy to lead—whatever his age.

I was called sulky too, I who am, as I truly believe, the least sulkily disposed of men. This was, I suppose, because when I was rebuffed it was to me like the striking of raw flesh. The merest slight, fancied or real, would cause me to withdraw into myself absolutely for a long spell. And as

Aunt Mary of set design, and Uncle Jacob from restive irritability, were always striking the raw of my soul, I appeared to them as often churlish as otherwise. With Uncle Jacob the result was, for me, admirable. For, being beyond his reach, as it seemed, I was therefore not beneath his assured control, and he was uncertain of me. Instead of harrying me as he did all others, he was watchful of me. In point of fact, so great was his power, the very sight of him sent fear into my soul. But he never knew this, and consequently did not take advantage of it. This gave me a reputation in the firm as being the only one who could stand up to him, and in order to live up to this reputation, I induced myself even to be a little defiant, which further increased my power—or fancied power; and to a young man a fancied power is soon apt to become a power vested in character. We grow like the image we gaze upon.

Yet there must have been something of truth in it all. For it is undeniably true, as I have said, that I had but few friends. I would return from my day's work in the City, and, after my evening meal, either read some light novel, or attire myself beyond a question of immaculateness in order to join a certain band of fellows who considered it the last word in rakishness to accost strange girls, who had come out to be accosted, and laugh and talk loudly with them. I must admit I take it as a credit to myself that I found their conception of pleasure a tame one. Some eight or nine of them would surround some two or three girls, and talk in loud, devil-may-care voices with them for an hour at a stretch, free of their cigarettes the while. This seemed to please them well. It pleased me little. I would, by attraction or device, edge one of the girls off, and with her, in quiet places, give myself to the utter abandon of being truly and everlastingly in love. It would be terrifying to count the occasions on which this happened, and I am to hope that all my vows everlastingly given (and everlastingly received) have not been everlastingly registered. They are mothers and old maids, and even mayhap grandmothers, now; but at any rate, if others with flash canes and cheap cigarettes dared no more than look at the ocean, we plunged our skiffs well upon it, even though it were true that we soon returned. At least, we were not mean-spirited.

Here again I emphasised my alienation from my

companions. But there was one companion who never tired of me, who would never let me tire of him. This was Tim Larkin. His flush was less and his freckles appeared more, but apart from this he had changed no whit. Even his speech was the same. The pronunciation, to be true, was better, but the syntax differed in no degree, and it was in his syntax he uttered himself. His knowledge of London's intricacies was amazing, and we would sometimes of an evening walk westward instead of returning home, and have a ridiculously cheap dinner at some ridiculously dirty restaurant he had discovered. This always meant a tempest on my return to Hampstead, but as I knew it was to come, I endured it in stony silence, and escaped to bed.

So my days sped, and so they might ever have sped, save for one supreme event that befell me.

III

I STRIKE ON A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Among the number of my friends there was one I have not mentioned. In my department, if department it may be called, I had all the dealings with printers with regard to proofs. From the acceptance of a design till the moment when it was finally passed for press (I refer only to such designs as needed execution on cloth or paper) its whole negotiation was in my hands. Daily I had to see Uncle Jacob and submit proofs to him that had come to hand. The alterations he wished in them, I had to see executed, and so submit, and re-submit, till the printing could be completed. In this one of those curious movements happened that have so often occurred in my life, when a tendency that began in weakness ended in power. For with a wholesome, or rather an unwholesome, dread, I feared those daily interviews. If a printer failed to emphasise what he considered the particular strength of a design, or chanced to blur its lines or diminish

its colours, his rage would not only be violent, but would recoil on me. His language was a revelation to me as to what a man can say and yet avoid profanity. There was no denying it, he would become as drunk on rage as any violent dipsomaniac on liquor. Once (and once only, be it said!) he struck me across the face with a ruler. I think I would have done him permanent bodily injury, except that he sprang to the other side of his desk when I leapt to my feet in anger. He never attempted that again, though he often pretended that his desk was my head, smiting at it lustily instead. Yet he made those interviews such a matter of dread for me that I began to revise the proofs for myself, only showing him the final product when I considered it would have passed his approval. Whether he knew I did this or not, I cannot say. Latterly, from the implication in some of his remarks, I gathered that he did. But the result was that I was the only one in the whole house who dared do anything without his investigation from end to end of the transaction. This gave me a dignity with the rest of the staff, and, in so far as he knew of it, it gave me weight with him. Thus I gained real power from a movement that sprang up in weakness: from fearfulness arose a kind of fearlessness.

But this led to other things. If I were in much doubt as to a proof, I wrote a letter to the artist in the name of the firm, asking him to call upon "our Mr. Elthorne"; and I not only made the acquaintance of many of them so, but I gained distinction with them. Some of them treated me with lofty condescension, and then I voted prigs, taking no more care over their work than I need. The majority of them, however, were kindly and well-disposed, and I would look forward to their visits with keen interest, as providing interesting conversations on a range of matters, and a corrective on my slowly formulated ideas of colour combinations and line balances. But there was one who was more than all this, towards whom, indeed, I grew to an affection that was strangely mixed with something almost like pity.

His name was James Ramsay. His quiet, strong face, decorated with an imperial beard that he always wore very neatly trimmed, his grave grey eyes, his lofty forehead, with his hair brushed well back—always kindled in me a warm feeling of trust as he appeared through the doorway of my room.

I had at first chiefly noticed his hands. They were strong by suggestion, although they really were thin and long. His fingers had the infinite suggestion of nervous power in them. In attire he was always negligently clothed in soft fabrics, even to his shirt and collar.

He made a figure picturesque enough, but what attracted me chiefly to him was his curious mixture of calm, strong self-reliance and utter helplessness. There was no man I would rather have been with in the extreme of danger or difficulty, and yet the prices he commanded from the firm for his work were ridiculously out of all relation to their worth, as another man would not have been a week in discovering. He did a great deal of work for the firm. Indeed, I had a shrewd thought that all his work was done for the firm.

The conversations I had with him extended over a wide range of subjects ; and I loved him, humanly enough, because, from his forty years to my nineteen, he always treated my opinions and thoughts as of equal value to his own. I even ventured to suggest to him sundry radical alterations in his designs, and although I do not remember his having altered one of them in accordance with my suggestions, he always justified them as against an equal point of view. Once, in a burst of appreciation of thankfulness at meeting the one man who did not always treat me as bumptious, I stumbled out an expression of gratitude at this.

"But, my dear boy," he said, in a tone of calm surprise, "you are quite right. You perfectly express your point of view. In fact, if I may say so, I have never known you venture any suggestion that was not a just expression of your point of view, and that, let me tell you, is a very great deal in a world where the majority of people are content to herd themselves in thoughtless masses taking some other's direction. Look at this design, for instance ! Your criticism is the way you see it, is your point of view. I only want to satisfy myself that it isn't *also* a criticism of the way in which I have executed *my* point of view. If it does extend so far, then I must give proper heed to it. Only I don't think it does, in this case, and if that is so, then I am entitled to my point of view as you are to yours, and entitled to it at the selfsame moment that you are to yours. It's all a question of personality. The more various the personalities that there are at

work, the nearer we are likely to get to the synthesis of truth. I only wish some of the muddle-headed critics would see so simple a thing as that."

"Yes, but when I say things most people call me bumptious—that's the word they throw at me. Even the people I like, after a while drop me." As I spoke, the accumulated bitterness of it came before me, and I think showed itself in my voice.

"Quite right of them. So they do me. It's their self-protection, that's all. Otherwise we should convict them of sin as the Bible puts it; the sin, the most truly beastly of all sins, of mental sloth. Don't you let it fret you, my boy. Always remember that those who live in darkness love not the light because their deeds are evil. And, by the way, it's just as well to know a few of those texts, because it's what the old 'uns rely on."

Listening to him was like breathing wind blown from off salt waves. It did not, as I certainly know, exalt me; it humbled me as it helped me. I had no necessity to fight for my own hand with this man, and consequently I was mellowed, I was encouraged, I became cooler and less impatient. My soul leapt up to see itself recognised, and thereupon resolved to win itself worthy of that recognition.

"You know, I wondered about you," he said.

"About me?"

"I thought you weren't finding yourself! I see you are. But you're not finding yourself in the healthiest possible way—which is scarcely your own fault. Never mind about that! I want you to do me a favour."

"I'll do anything you like, Mr. Ramsay," said I, and so I would have, to the slaying of Uncle Jacob.

Out came his hand without a word and I placed mine in it.

"Right then! I'll send you a book I want you to read. Let me see, this is the third of the month. I want it read *twice* by the third of next month. It'll be tough work for you just now, but never mind! Read at lunch, in trains, and at all times. Then, at the end of the time, you come up to my rooms, and tell me what you think of what it says. Good-bye!"

So he was gone. If anything were wanted to induce me to

carry out my promise, it was just that thought of going to see him in his own rooms. But before I could even reflect on it, a voice sang out :

“Crikey! But that’s a man, as I will say. I say, if we had a chap like him in the sweep’s place, eh? What oh! Wouldn’t the wheels go wound?” Larkin and I had the room to ourselves—if it can be called a room that was only an alcove shut off by wainscoting from the passage it formed part of,—and he stood up with his eyes flashing with pleasure as he spoke.

“He’s one of the best, is Ramsay. It’s simply shocking the prices he gets here for his work.” I knew both from the cashier and from Ramsay what those prices were.

But at this moment all further parley on the subject was cut short by Mr. Tonson’s entry, with :

“Larkin, I want you to go out for me.”

“Go to mamma!”

“No! Go out, I said.”

What exactly Tonson had in mind I do not know, but Larkin let off a peal of derisive laughter at this. There were few men who could have made mere, wordless laughter cut like a flail as he did, and Tonson darkened angrily. I say darkened advisedly, for he possessed no colour, and where other men flushed red, he changed from yellow-white to a colour like that of lead.

“Look here! I want none of your insolence.” It was a phrase frequently on Tonson’s lips, and with as frequent occasion.

“Oh, go to mamma! Besides, *he’s* my boss, not you!”

“I shall then report you.”

“Oh yes, I don’t s’pose! I can see you tramping in for more than one bottle-washing in the day, I can. That’s a thing you rather love, that is. You take care you don’t fall over yourself going in. I’ll bet you level odds he’ll chuck the inkwell at you for your pains. Oh yes, I may say—Look out! Here he is!”

It was. One needed only to have seen Tonson’s face to have learnt that uncle had entered the room. It resumed its perennial ashiness while his eyes took a hunted glance right and left. I myself was not a little perturbed, for it was an unusual thing for Uncle Jacob to search me out in my room.

My heart took up its sledge-hammer beat that he generally managed to awaken.

"Is it true that Mr. Ramsay has been here?" he began as he entered, glaring angrily at me.

"Yes, I believe so. That's to say, yes, he has."

"How is it he has been here without my seeing him?"

"Well——"

"It's not for you to see him. It's for me to see him."

"But——"

"What did he come about?"

"About this proof of his."

"Which proof?" He snatched it up as he spoke. "What is this? I haven't seen this yet. Why haven't I seen this yet?"

"I was just going to bring it down to you." I was not, in fact. I was at work on it, and it would have been days ere he had seen it. But I dared not say that.

"When did it come?"

"This morning."

"Why didn't you bring it down to me this morning?"

"I forgot it."

Then he caught sight of Tonson endeavouring to sidle out of the door. It was unfortunate for Tonson, but it relieved me at an awkward moment.

"Tonson, what are you doing here? Dear, dear me! Dear, dear me! What do you mean, sir, by not answering me?"

"Yes, sir!" said Tonson.

"Don't be a fool, Tonson."

"Yes, sir; I came to ask Mr. Elthorne about something, sir."

"Oh, go out! Can't I have a moment's peace from you?"

Tonson needed but little encouragement to make his exit. When he had gone, Uncle Jacob with a quick, keen, almost falcon-like glance, looked over my desk, and gathering up each and all of the proofs that lay on it, made off out of the room with them, to my complete consternation—not to say my fear also, for there were but few of them that he had seen.

When he had gone, Larkin, who had all this while been studiously bent over his desk, writing even as though he had had the whole room to himself, suddenly looked up and said :

“ His head.”

“ What about his head ? ” I asked sulkily.

“ Why don’t you bang it against the wall, eh ? ”

“ I believe I shall one of these days.” I felt exhausted and irritable always after seeing Uncle Jacob.

“ Chap of your size, too. You should do Mohawk Indian with him. I believe he’d never get over it.”

As I went out to my lunch, I found that Mr. Ramsay had left a packet for me in the showroom. Curiously I undid it, and discovered it to be a cheap and strong edition of “ Sartor Resartus ”—I have it now before me as I write. I may or may not have glanced into it before, but now I was to read it. Moreover, it was actually to be the first book of any account that I was, of my free will, to read in my life. Novels from the perdurable shelf of English prose I had read, and I need scarcely say that, apart from the divine air of poetry, the novel I account as of considerable significance in the ranks of art, if it may only shed itself of its tendency to mere reproduction as distinct from creation. But I had skipped in novels if the millstream of the plot had not run strong. And now I was about to read differently. I distinctly remember putting the book in my pocket, and stepping forward into Queen Victoria Street with a new thrill and determination to think that it lay there.

IV

JAMES RAMSAY

Alas ! the rosy peaks, as rosy peaks will, grew dim and pale. The thrilling flush of a momentous resolve faded away, and the discouragement that has a sneer for smile took its place. At lunch that day I read the preliminary, and was immeasurably stirred by some of its passages, being as immeasurably confused by others. That evening I struggled with more of it, but somehow, strangely, found myself presently in the night-air, with heart beating high, thinking to find some girl with whom to taste of the sweetness of new love in love's caravanserai that is also a sample-room. The following day saw no advance, and a week later saw but little advance.

Then I fell back on my doggedness. I clung to my task with fierce tenacity, pushing through the pages even though I left understanding far behind. As the month grew on, I used to stand in my room leaning against the bedpost and reading, lest even sitting should send me to sleep. I adopted all kinds of methods. I did on more than one occasion drape a towel over my shoulders, and, dipping my head into a basin of water, read on so, with my hair dripping wet, and my head cold. But the month had nearly passed, and I had not yet finished the first reading. I walked to and fro my room reading passages aloud to myself, till Aunt Mary came up to ask me if I had taken leave of my senses. By that time, for some reason hard to elucidate yet powerful in fact, having heard her coming, I had hidden the book—and so I appeared all the more a lunatic.

Moreover, other matters had distracted my attention. For on the day following his visit Uncle Jacob summoned me into his room, and asked me how it was that so many of the proofs had been marked for correction that yet had not been seen by him. I stammered out some faulty reply, which he quickly cut short.

"I'm not going to have it. You're both shifty and unscrupulous. I shall have this thing stopped. May I ask who you are that you should arrogate this to yourself? Everything must come through me. Everything, you understand? Everything. I am the alembic for this firm."

I was hot and flushed. I was furious with anger, and confused.

"I only tried to save you work," I said, in an anger that yearned against the bars of its cage, but dared not do more.

"You did nothing of the kind. Don't tell me lies. You only wished to assert yourself in your offensive way. If it weren't that you are my solemn charge from the hand of the dead——"

I was angry, as I have said, flamingly angry, or he would have struck me. As it was, he sufficed himself with tearing up some unanswered letters and hurling his pen across the room.

"Go out of the room!" As I went he called out: "I am writing to the printers to-day, telling them they are to receive no proofs for alteration unless with a letter signed by me." A moment after, as I went up the stairs, I heard him in gracious and silken accents greet an artist into his room.

The deliberate degradation, as I read it, conveyed by his last words wounded me where few things could have done. I could have cried in my sensitive pride as I thought of it. I felt as though I could have fled, have done anything, rather than face the printers and the artists again with what had seemed to be a power proved to be no more than an arrogation. Such was the effect on me that for two days I could do no work. I sat at my desk brooding hotly on it, while the discreet Larkin took no notice of me. At night I strode out in long heavy walks thinking on it. I believe even Aunt Mary was impressed, for she did not even question me when I returned back several nights running with the hour towards midnight. Certainly reading was not to be thought of. Yet, as I have said, I held on to it tenaciously. Indeed, the very wounding of my pride in a measure aided my reading. It drove me into myself, it made me resolve to be dependent on myself for company, and consequently, when at home (for I had come to call it home) I kept to my room, and being there, struggled with my reading. The two things began to be associated together, which was an obvious preparation for their becoming the obverse and reverse of the same thing.

Also, arising out of this same matter, I discovered something else that was to have a considerable influence on my life when it had fully ripened itself. In my deeply-set fury at Uncle

Jacob I began to assume an attitude of avowed militancy against him. Previously I had been fearful of him, or at times won to a strange affection for him, for he had a subtle power of riding over the earthworks of a previous combat and taking his seat in the citadel of one's affection, winning by a play on the emotions what he could not achieve by a straight fight. He had even made me feel sometimes that it was a great pride to myself, a considerable favour done me, that I should deny myself, inconvenience myself, and even pain myself in his interests without reward or emolument. But now I set my mind in enmity against him. I determined to hold no truck with him, whether of fear or of affection. When I went in to see him at the office I would, before entering the door, brace my mind to repel him. Immediately I entered the door I grappled with him; I and he, though neither spoke, even before we looked on one another, wrestled as it were in spirit together. It was not my desire to defeat him; that I scarcely aspired to; all I wished was to throw him off, to refuse his advancing spirit dominion over me, and to hold my being inviolate of him. This I only did because I felt he had insulted me; but I began to notice (what I did not for a long time really think deeply upon) that when I left his presence, instead of feeling exhausted and crumbled as had once been the case, I was as strong as I had been before I had seen him, and even sometimes stronger.

As I have said, this did not then find a place in my thoughts. But it had a marked influence on the general tenour of my life. My reading, even as I struggled with it, took a new significance. Even when it defeated me it did not discourage me, for my mind had become more resilient and alert.

Yet my time was nearly complete, and I had not even read three-fourths of the book. Consequently I was not overjoyed when one morning Mr. Ramsay came in. He did not say anything for a moment or two, but just looked quietly at me.

"Well," said he, at length, "at any rate it's a grand book."

"I haven't done as you asked."

"I know."

"I've not even read it once through."

"I wondered about that, but I wasn't sure."

"You know, it's not always easy to read."

"Not till you catch the hang of it, then it's easy enough."

Its clothes fit the matter well—which is as it should be, seeing the nature of the book indeed. Maybe it's strong meat for you, but it has had its effect, I see."

I did not catch his meaning and looked puzzled.

"Look at your eye," he explained, "look at your chin even, not to say the hold of your head. Oh, we're all right, my boy; I pronounce you a good case. When can you come up and have a chat with me? Saturday?"

"I should like to very much."

"Very well then! By the way, what does this mean?" And he produced from his inner pocket Uncle Jacob's letter.

It was the only one of the letters I had seen. The others had had their effect, so efficaciously indeed that I had not even seen them. It was written in a tone of kindly condescension, as of an uncle who was pained because he had to inhibit his nephew's possible irresponsibilities. I burned as I read it. Even with Mr. Ramsay I could not speak freely about it, but he gathered from my hints the general nature of the case.

"I did not think it was like that," he said. "I am sorry." Then seeing my somewhat crestfallen, not to say bitter, expression, he added: "But don't you let it discourage you. I won't say your criticisms on the general conception of a design are any way near his. That would be too absurd, you know. His grasp of Art in its application to practical domestics, large and small, is masterly; it is, strictly, genius of a high and irresponsible order. I don't suppose there are two other men in Europe to equal him. But for your purpose your criticisms were more than adequate, and always fresh and luminous. Don't you be put off, my boy! This letter came from the heart and instinct of a bully. Look here, can you come up to my rooms to-night?"

I leapt at the proposal. I expected it would occasion trouble at home, but this was, to be true, rather an incentive than otherwise to me then.

So that evening I made my way westward to Sloane Square, near where Mr. Ramsay lived. It was the early spring, and there was all the merit of surprise about the blue light that flushed the evening sky. The streets seemed to be lit by some unacquainted inner illumination as I set out to walk the greater part of the distance. The walk I reckoned would

happily fill up the time, and still more happily save my purse. I did not take Larkin with me. I think he a little felt the slight, for it was not often I went westward without him; but there was an inner illumination springing up within me, similar to that which lit the streets without, as mystical and incommensurable, that I wished to nurse and enjoy to the full. So I pretended to make busy while he waited about, and it was not till he had disappeared, with clouds of smoke trailing over his shoulders from his phenomenally large pipe, that I myself went out. When he and I went together we usually went by way of the Embankment, but now I had a strong secret desire to go up through Fleet Street. It depressed me as I trod it, I admit; the bright illumination that had made me mount St. Paul's steps in order to feast my eyes in silent and profound joy on the blue that was everywhere, the blue that even came between me and the nearer houses, in which the street lights swam like floating, detached jewels, or like gleams of phosphorescence in a sea of mystical foam, had faded out in Fleet Street, crushed out, as it were, by the near, drab houses that pressed towards each other across the street. In the Strand it was better; but there night was growing thicker, and I had to turn into my own thoughts more for solace.

Ignorant young snob that I was, I was quite chagrined, on discovering the street in which Mr. Ramsay lived, to find that it was a blind slum alley. Children were playing about the street. It was badly lit, and there was an unhappy odour of grease about the air. When I found the number I wanted, I saw that it was an old, black, chipped and charred door between two shop bay-windows, in one of which boots were exhibited, and in the other, fried fish. I was distinctly depressed and set back as I pulled on a large bell-handle. I was still more depressed when, following on the clang I set up, a woman with bare arms and in a sacking apron appeared.

"Mr. Ramsay?" I asked.

"That's 'is bell," said she, jerking her finger at the other side of the door and swinging it violently in my face.

Looking where she had pointed, I saw a small electric bell with James Ramsay's name painted on the woodwork above it. I pressed it and waited, although I felt far more like returning to Hampstead than remaining. Mr. Ramsay's

appearance, however, dispelled a good deal of my depression. His eyes kindled, and he stretched out both his arms in welcome, with yet no lapse from his simple gravity.

"Good, good!" said he, "come along!"

I followed him wonderingly up wooden, uncarpeted stairs and between greasy, ill-smelling walls. When we reached the second floor landing, however, I saw another door facing us, which he opened with a small key. As I followed him within, a sudden transformation greeted me. A simple carpet covered the stairs, but what my eyes turned to at once were the walls, which were covered with a large number of original sketches, most of them signed by their respective artists. They were so numerous as almost to be pieced in together. It was so all the way up to the next stage, and so all round its walls. There were three doors here, and opening one of them he led me into a fairly spacious room well lined with books.

"You are well shut away up here, aren't you?" I said.

"'But I, *mein Werther*, I am alone with the stars.' Do you remember it?"

I glowed with the memory of it.

"By the way," he continued, as on a sudden thought, "I didn't ask you to a meal for I usually have my more important ones outside. Have you fed?"

"I had something on my way down."

"Good; there are cigarettes there, and that's my tobacco jar."

As he spoke he re-lit his pipe and sank back into a very large wicker-chair, leaving me to its pair opposite it. A lively fire danced in the grate, and a shaded electric light shed a subdued light through the room. We sat and smoked in quiet peace for a long while before either of us spoke. Nor, I imagine, was I free of a little side-glance of satisfaction at the picture we presented thus.

But there was something I had resolved to say, and, lest it should be crushed out in our later conversation, I determined to say it now. In a quiet, even tone of voice, gently, as one would thrust a skiff on to a lake without disturbing its waters, I began, without so much as a glance at my companion:

"Mr. Ramsay, there's something I have very much been wanting to say for some time. Except that I don't want to intrude——"

"My dear boy!"

"It's about the prices for your designs."

"Well?" I felt something in that word that told me I was intruding, but I held to my resolve doggedly.

"They're not nearly enough."

He was perfectly silent, and I felt a tenseness in the air. I doubted my wisdom in mentioning the subject. I much regretted having done so, but having embarked on it I had to go forward.

"Uncle Jacob's fleecing you." How I cursed myself as I went onward!

"Oh well," he said, in easier tones now, "we are all trying to fleece one another—maybe we are, maybe we're not—only some of us certainly don't succeed."

"No, I don't mean that."

He just looked steadily at me, not unkindly. I determined to pluck boldly at what I wished to say. My very sense of awkwardness produced a feeling of desperation.

"I mean, the thing's going on steadily when it needn't." It was easier to determine than to achieve. "I say, why should it?—why should a thing like that go on when it can be stopped?—why should one man, and a jolly rich man, rob—for that's what it is—rob another man who's not rich, when you can stop it by just sitting down hard? I don't see it. I think it's horrible."

I think Mr. Ramsay saw that my very genuine desire to befriend him was not so much the incentive in itself as the occasion by which a brooding, half-articulate sense of injustice could vent itself and come into the field of its own self-recognition, for he sat forward in his chair at this, and making a gesture with his right hand that was always the prelude to a kindness of speech that expressed itself in a low, vibrant, even tone, he simply said:

"And how are you to stop it, lad?"

"By just sitting down hard."

"And in the meantime—?" His gesture included by implication the room in which we sat and the flat of which it formed part. "One must live, you know, Jack." It was

the first time he had called me by the familiar name, and I thrilled to it.

"Yes, I know. But you take my word for it, he wouldn't do without your work at twice the rate."

"You know of course that I have put a higher grade of return to him several times, and he has always said—you know, lad, with the customary throwing about of furniture and heaven-protesting tempers—that the present is the absolutely fullest possible limit of payment."

"Which is a lie. But why ask? Why not just say it has been happy to work together, and all that kind of smarm, and that you've got the chance now of twice the pay, which you must take in justice to yourself. Don't ask, just withdraw, and I bet he'll be after you like knife. And it's right too. Both Smithsons and Perkins would give it to you like a shot if they only knew that nearly all Mueler's decoration designs were yours."

I had never known Mr. Ramsay laugh. His eyes kindled, a flicker hovered about his lips like light in water, and that was generally all. But now he threw himself back in his chair, and, with his legs in the air, laughed; great Homeric laughter.

"My boy," he said, sitting upright again, "it shall be done as you say. It's worth it, if only as a great humour to see how a curmudgeon reveals his soul. I was to see him next Monday with some designs. I won't take them, Jack. I shall—I shall—what's your word? smarm, that's it—I shall smarm instead."

I was going to be such a fool as to spoil a good thing by further talk, in very elation at having won my point, but he, with a fitter sense of climax than I, and a firmer will to enforce it, sprang out of his chair in intermission of further conversation, drawing me after him in order to learn how the very best coffee in London should be made.

Each detail of that ritual was carefully attended to by myself, for already there were thoughts brewing in me of a life bohemian for myself. The two boilings, the drawing-off of the fumes, the addition of the salt at the precise moment, all these, and more also, I memorised for future use. I could not, however, discover from him how much salt it was necessary to add. He could only tell me that this was a matter of instinct, it

was merely done aright, as irresponsibly yet as inevitably as the few dashes or dots that make a suggested gauze texture stand away from the flesh of a figure in a drawing, and none could say why or how. I determined to see if I could not by some means get practice for myself in the art. The same cause that had led me to make my way through Fleet Street, in this sympathetic atmosphere touched me to dreams on dreams. My month's strenuous grapple at reading had had its effect. Those intangible yet stirring day-dreams of swaying vast masses, convened in some ill-recognised yet sufficiently mystical way, by the spell of oratory, had been changed, or, more truly, had taken a new direction, and I had begun to conceive of an outlet for soaring ambition that could definitely be grappled with and subdued.

Therefore, when we returned to the fireside and our wicker-chairs, I was ripe and ready for a discussion on the subject of my reading. How luminous things became under his reading! Nay, how self-revealed many passages stood, that had defied me, under the simple inflexion of his voice as he read them! I saw then, what I have never forgotten to this day when I have in some ways perhaps wandered far from Carlyle, how absolutely his style bore the weight, stress and relief of the speaking voice of that tempestuous great soul.

"It is useless," said Mr. Ramsay to me after a long spell of it, "saying anything to any man who does not in his soul know it already. There are some men to whom I would just as soon think of speaking as I now speak as I would think of leaping a precipice. They are outside it—that's all. We each of us can only speak to our own sibs, you know. And it's because I have seen your consciousness struggling to catch and express your soul, that I speak to you like this—why, in fact, I, in the first instance, gave you 'Sartor' to read. After that, I'm going to ask you to go through Wordsworth."

"The poet of simplicity!" I broke out, in a tender pride of having gathered so much one way or another.

But my soaring pride of equality was soon winged by the steady, bemused glance with which my companion looked on me. I tried even to challenge him by holding his glance with an aspect of firm self-reliance, although in truth I felt far from

that in myself. Which probably was why he did not spare me.

"That's what I call the average critic-foolery, Elthorne. But you'll shake free of it. Look at the way you're beginning to shake free of your uncle, which is no small feat! No, no! The poet of flaming, soul-shaking mysticism, if you like. That's why I say come to him after 'Sartor,' although they seem so odd a mixture. But I won't spoil your own finding. Let me read you a few things."

And then he read. What he read I do not remember; I only remember being turned out by him at a very late hour and going home in a vision. Time had been banished for me. By no reckoning has the clock-face of Time any reality. Its hours have each a different value, and in the few hours that had intervened between my leaving the City, more had transpired in me than in almost the three years of my business life. I think if someone had reminded me that the day was yet the same as that in which I had transacted a round of dreary, wasteful routine at Thames Street, I should have contradicted him sharply, indignantly. Ages had passed since that drab, inauspicious labour; I was finding myself, and I was full of a grave exaltation. In truth, Mr. Ramsay had saved me years, maybe, of blundering, stumbling self-discovery, and in the sudden swiftness of my advance I was looking round on a new wonderful country that filled me with a joy I could scarcely contain. It intoxicated me, and I knew nothing of the way in which I found myself home. My various ganglia-centres fulfilled their automatic functions while my soul gazed round in wonder at the new horizons within which it had been suddenly advanced.

V

FRANK RE-ENTERS IN A NEW RÔLE

It is not so easy to make good an advance as to make the advance, as any military tactician will be able to attest. That I did not know then, or did not realise it properly, for it was a great chagrin to me in the days following to find that all the glory had gone and that patience and labour had to ensue. It was like nothing so much as my first visit to the Grindelwald. The evening I arrived the sisterly peaks stood round, near and majestic and wonderful, hanging right over the balcony of the hotel with crests that changed from gleaming silver to a pale flush of rose as the sun sank away and darkness wrapt the valley. I went down to dinner as in a dream. I had conversed with earth in her majesty and received her unutterable secret into my soul. I was like one caught away to a height where timeless communications flowed about me, and the conversation of those I sat amongst struck on me and fell back unanswered. I had afterwards fled out beneath the stars as in a trance. The following morning I had awoken early, thinking to see those peaks stand up mighty and sudden and shining in the glory of a sunlit world, but I had leapt out of bed and advanced to the balcony to see it all blotted out. A mist stood in the valley, the mountains were gone, and all that was to be seen were the green fields that it did not need a journey to Switzerland to see.

But in one case as in the other my very disappointment was a proof of possession. I was in the country of wonder, and I knew of it. The very day after my visit to Mr. Ramsay's rooms, I drew out a goodly portion of the little moneys I had managed to save and began book-purchasing. My nightly labour began now to draw itself into the small hours of the morning, and I used to drape an ancient pair of trousers along the bottom of the door lest Aunt Mary, seeing a gleam of light, should either upbraid me for wasteful extravagance or as incontinently enquire into the reason of my late hours.

The whole of my doggedness was upcalled now. But a new difficulty arose, and one that I scarcely knew how to circumvent at first. For at the end of that week Frank returned from school, and it had been resolved that on the

following Monday he should commence business in a firm of stockbrokers in Broad Street. He himself was not too elated at the prospect, but seeing that it meant his sharing my room, I scarcely knew how to contain my chagrin. I had usually welcomed him back with glee as my one friend in a house of enemies, but my joy was so dashed with disappointment that I imagine Frank thought I had brought our old callous code to a refinement that was beyond all admiration. His manner toward me was quite abashed. And when I picked a quarrel with him on the first evening, retired to our room, and read with the full light on till two o'clock in the morning, he, thinking it all part of the refinement, made no protest, but only responded by gruffness.

But this could not be done every evening. I repeated the dose on the second evening, and again on the third evening, till he began to think that, code or no code, the thing was getting beyond the limits of forbearance. That evening (it was a Sunday evening) we had a prodigious quarrel, a quarrel that I, exasperated to find the mists still around, and exasperated at being hindered in the attempt painfully to strip them away, aggravated to the full, I fear. This brought Aunt Mary in to separate us. The cold austerity she habitually adopted toward Uncle Jacob became with us a fierce strength that was not a little terrifying.

"What do you mean by it?" she cried out as she entered the room, "upsetting the peace of the whole house in this way!" Her very voice had an edge on it that cut like knives when she was angry, and her first words hushed our wrangle. "You, Jack, who like to think yourself a man, and give yourself such airs and graces, can't you realise that it would be a little more to the point if you didn't squabble so much?" Her carefully chosen suggestions writhed about my sensitiveness like so many whips. "Is your head so swollen that you can't even abide your brother? I thought you two held yourselves together against us!" That beast of a cousin of mine must have borne our very words to her! "I can plainly see that I must separate you two and put you in separate rooms!"

Neither Frank nor I had a word in reply to her. My very anger had disappeared in the pain she inflicted by seeking carefully out all my raw sensitiveness and whipping on to it.

It was always her plan of diabolical campaign, to arrive

first with a volume of words, and not to cease till, by one device or another, she had reduced her opponent to a secure silence. Then she would promptly withdraw, with the same terrific velocity and dignity, as she had arrived. She did this now, leaving us to crawl into bed in silence—and in darkness too, for she had celebrated, if not enforced, her victory by turning off the light.

Unlike my usual self, who generally slept more heavily than healthily, I lay awake long that night thinking over things. Aunt Mary's closing words had raised a thought in my mind that would not let me go. A fire had been raised in my soul these days that subdued all things to itself. I had glimpsed visions that seemed to me, even though I but half-knew them, more than life itself. It seemed to me, not that nothing should stand in their way, but that nothing could stand in their way. Earthly relationships were as nothing beside them. And when Frank's presence in my room hindered their realisation, and when Aunt Mary threatened, on a renewal of the trouble, to remove the presence, it seemed to me that there was only one thing that could be done. It was an undesirable thing, it was even a brutal thing, and I would neither look firmly at it nor as firmly resolve upon it—but I knew that it would come to pass.

I should probably have set about it forthwith except that the following day was Frank's first day at business, and on my calling for him at his office in Broad Street he seemed (to my mature experience of City affairs!) so helpless and so obviously mystified and bewildered that all my old feeling of the elder brother and protector revived in me. Even the momentous matter of finding my own soul and learning the power that lay in that discovery, seemed to me to lapse by order of right, if only for awhile, before that responsibility. In addition to which, another matter came to my knowledge that caused me untold, if secret, elation. For at dinner Uncle Jacob took it upon him, as both Frank and I knew he would, to congratulate Frank on his first day of business experience, to speak nothing of the advice sure to follow thereon.

"If you are honest, and work hard, and seek to please those that are above you, you are sure to get on and prosper," said he, knowing full well, of course, that seven-tenths of the City of London exists in flat contradiction of this hereditary cheap

wisdom of employers. Indeed, the amount of prevarication he indulged in was extraordinary, for, vicious though he was, he was yet one of the acutest of living brains, and could divine the truth of a situation with bewildering accuracy with the least possible facts before him. So he said: "Always keep your eyes and wits open for new ideas that shall extend the sphere of your master's business: nothing repays like that;" although if he knew anything he must have known that if there is one thing above another the average English employer desires, it is that he shall be allowed to pursue his ancient habits unmolested, and that if there is one thing above another he resents, it is that his employees should dare to suggest that there is anything under the sun his ripe experience does not know full well. He himself was only a partial exception to the rule. For he, when I suggested new proposals to him, would scoff at them and me, and then in a month or so produce them as examples of his own insight and sagacity. But it is an instinct in most men to defend their own caste, and seeing that Frank had just joined the ranks of employees, even so shrewd and independent a mind as Uncle Jacob's could not resist the temptation to pour the usual employer unction over him.

So it was little wonder if neither Frank nor I gave close hearing to the tide of words that flowed forward as dinner progressed. But there came a break in it, and the mention of a certain name, that startled my dreaming thoughts into immediate attention. He had been saying to Frank: "Never miss an opportunity, always try and turn disaster into victory by holding firmly on: in all my long life I have never given in, however bad things looked, and by holding on and hard work, and by cleaving—cleaving, that's it—to my ideals, in the good hand of fortune defeats have always come out to be victories in the end:" when he suddenly broke away:

"Mary, my dear, I nearly came to losing Ramsay to-day."

"Oh!" said she, half hearing what he said, and half watchful that she should not lose the upper hand of the conversation that was to ensue.

"Nearly, but I was one too many for them;" and he chuckled with satisfaction while I grew strained and anxious.

"What do you mean?" Her words rang crisply out, and there was the suspicion of the crack of the whip in them.

"Smithsons, I think, had approached him, though how

Smithson knew it was he worked for me I do not know. But Smithson is one of those pushing, officious men who would never have the honour to recognise that it was I who made Ramsay. Quite an unscrupulous man, Smithson; the rising up of men like him is spoiling all the old happy relations between artists——”

“Is there anything you want, Henry?” Henry, too, was home for the holidays, and this was Aunt Mary’s method of intimating to Uncle Jacob that he had better get to the point and cease his digression. It was tolerably obvious to all of us, and I felt quite sorry for him as I saw him flush crimson, his eyes glaring angrily but futilely at her.

There was a moment of strained silence, and I almost expected to see him foam up in one of his blind rages. But the memory of the futility of previous displays combined with the urgency of what he wanted to say to restrain him.

“He came to me to-day,” he began in a surly way, “and said he could not show me any more designs, as it was likely he might be working for other people. Not for a long time could I get him to say what his other offer was. But I got it out of him.” His manner grew warmer as he became more elated. “Yes, yes, I got it from him. He didn’t say outright, but I could declare I was right in suggesting twice as much. I suggested less first, but that doesn’t matter: Smithson’s an unscrupulous and dishonourable man, and I was compelled to barter for things of beauty.” Aunt Mary’s warning eye arrested him quickly in the threatened digression. “Twice as much! Think of that! It’s simply ruin. But I had to spoil Smithson. I had to. That goes without saying. So I told Ramsay it was his duty to me—I who made him—to let me close with him at the terms of his offer. He wouldn’t at first, simply wouldn’t reply: momentary success, as I say, always ruins an artist’s morals. But I forced him to. It’s simply ruin, but I couldn’t afford to let him go.”

I could scarcely restrain a cry of joy as this recital went forward. Lest the shining joy I felt in my soul should show its glory in my face and betray me, I bent down over my plate as I ate. I felt glad, too, that my natural instinct of secrecy had made me leave Aunt Mary to infer that I had been on one of my occasional evenings with Tim on that celebrated night in Mr. Ramsay’s rooms.

I went away upstairs after dinner glad to be free of restraint. Frank came up after me wishing to know what was the matter, and I had not the heart to pick a quarrel with him. Yet, as I knew, and as it depressed me to know, the quarrels with him would have to be undertaken and undergone. It was as though a necessity of Fate had been laid upon me. I never thought of questioning it, even when I least liked it, and postponed it.

VI

TIME, TIM LARKIN AND MYSELF

Tim Larkin, both in his name and in his personality, was of that range of human beings that one terms characters in order to distinguish them from the less interesting rank. They change, as all life must change, but the change in them never serves to take direction. The changes in others, in the rank of men, are the result of growth, but the change in Tim was like the hazard of circumstance. He was timeless, like Jack the Giant Killer. It does not matter if Jack be at the top of the Beanstalk, at the bottom of the Beanstalk, or the middle of his climb up the Beanstalk, sitting at home discontented or slaying the giant: in one and all of his occupations his age was, and will ever be, the same. So it was with Larkin. It was no more than an irrelevance (however important that irrelevance might be to his salary in Mueller & Co., Ltd.) that he paid a better regard to the cleanliness of his collar, that he dispersed his assortment of aspirates with happier accuracy among his words, or that he wore his red hair longer, and for the first few hours of the day succeeded in displaying a painful parting in it. I believe these were the result of my influence on him, and that if my presence had been removed he would have discarded these attempts to please me as unpicturesque uniformities of conduct that no longer had any justification.

But not only did he not grow, he even sometimes forcibly protested against my labour to grow. During the years we both, of course, changed; but the change in me took a forward and upward direction, while the change in him circled and gyrated round itself; and he tacitly recognised this by crying out upon it.

"Always muggin' at a book, you are, nowadays, as I may say," he exclaimed once, in tones half of injury, half scorn. "Think you'll choke your brain-pan with a lot o' good, I don't s'pose! You mind you don't get yourself into a knot you can't untie. Oh yes!"

"Do you good if you read a bit too," I replied, may be sententiously enough, but I believe with kindly intention.

"Oh yes, I don't s'pose!"

"So it would!"

"I'm not a fancy bird, to get my neck into a knot, if you are, I may say." He wriggled his neck in his collar as though to emphasise the point. "What's the book now?"

"Philosophy and Faith," I said.

"That's what you call a rhyme, I s'pose!"

"What?"

"Philosophy and Faith."

"You mean alliteration."

"Crikey! I don't s'pose!—You go on, my son, you do; and may I tell you what'll 'appen?"

"What?"

"You'll trip yourself."

"Oh!"

"Yus! And your head'll hit the old sweep's tummy, and then it'll be you or 'im!"

"Think so?"

"Wish I knew the Derby winner sure as I know that, I do! Oh yes, I don't s'pose! Anyhow, better that than a bit of old mother's washing like the jackdaw, I may say. It's a bit more o' God's promise, it is. Oh yes, don't you split yourself, I'm watching."

At such times I seemed to catch a note almost of envy in Tim's manner. It might have been no more than my fancy, it might have been my self-esteem seeking sustenance, for it certainly comforted and fed it. Those who remember me at that time might scoff at the remark, yet I needed such

comfort and sustenance. My very assertiveness was a proof of that, though it brought me many enemies. For I notice that self-esteem, in young men anyway, is not often offensive save when its cause is denied. Mr. Ramsay, I know, thought highly of me, and he never found me assertive. With him, indeed, I was enabled to recognise myself; and I was almost crushed with a sense of the thing in me struggling for expression. He recognised it, and enabled it to thrive in a curious and almost overwhelming sense of humility. Others denied it, were even supercilious of it, with the result that it arose in fierce challenge—and it could not be surprising if others found that challenge offended them, for they had first offended me.

Yet however much I was kindled to Tim by the note of envy that flickered through his cries of protestation at my pangs of growth, I am frank to say I had need of such kindling. And I had need of such a note of envy from him. He and his mother at Shepherd's Bush may have had to live near the bone, but there was a spirit of deep contentment in him. He remained the same whatever came, with his odd ways and shrewd poetical mind. His only perturbation was his periodic protestation against myself. And that was symbolical, for he was a stranger, both by nature and by hazard, to the pangs that had afflicted me. As I look back upon those days I am stirred to a wonder at myself. Tim would set off towards the Embankment each evening with the clouds of smoke from his newly-lit pipe streaming like wings over his shoulders, while I would take my way to Hampstead to my reading, weary of it, but dogged, anxious almost to burke it, and setting myself to begin without fail at the precise moment of a quarter to eight. For Tim and I, I have since thought, are almost as much of two wholly different orders of beings as Man and the Spirits that inhabit the secret places of Nature. It seems to me a primitive piece of folly to assume that all men are of the same hierarchy of souls because their bodies present the same appearance.

It was not as though I had elected to behave as I behaved. It was rather as though it had been thrust upon me. My very struggle with Frank to secure my soul's privacy in the struggle I underwent was viewed by me with positive aversion, and yet proceeded with unflinchingly. He, I could see,

was puzzled at me. We had had our quarrels, but we had always stood by each other with a loyalty that overrode all personal disagreement, and here was I seeking to be rid of him, and that, moreover, in a house where we regarded ourselves as in an enemy's country! Little wonder it puzzled him! Happily half my struggle was dispensed with. I would have struggled to the end, I know, but after no more than a week of quarrelling, when Aunt Mary one morning was upbraiding me and causing her deft whip of words to writhe about my naked soul, Uncle Jacob, in one of his rare moods of kindly toleration and keen perception, intervened:

"They're too old to be together in one room now. They should have separate rooms."

A light flashed across my soul at the word. But Aunt Mary was not to be baulked of her prey.

"There's less excuse for Jack than for Frank. He likes to be considered a man."

She paused as on an interrogation, but I said nothing.

"Do you hear me?"

Still I did not reply. What had I to say?

"You had best not be morose and sulky as well." Her eyes were fixed on mine as I endeavoured to flash back my defiance.

"Frank could have the spare room overlooking the tennis-lawn," went on Uncle Jacob, picking up the matter where he had left it.

Envy leapt in me as he spoke, for the room mentioned was larger and far better situated than mine. But I held my peace, for greater issues, I felt, were at stake than a matter of rooms.

So it came about that I kept my room to myself, which is to say that I kept my soul to myself, and maintained its defence in the hour of its great adventure. Aunt Mary would have been speechless with horror at the thought of the few pence extra expenditure a week, had she known that I kept my light on till the small hours of the morning always. But I saved her that unhappiness by my judicious use of the old pair of trousers.

It was not all reading I did. Manuscript paper had been bought, and I, as years stole onward, nightly wrote out my soul in straining and chaotic essays. These I showed to none,

and spoke of to none. Not even Mr. Ramsay. Every month I would go down to his room and we would talk. At first we talked of my reading, but we were not long before we passed that period and discussed independent subjects as might two equal souls. His frank acceptance of equality, not to say his undisguised and instant attention to some of the things I said, won me to a mood that was all the more adventurous because it was conceived in humility—as though it must thrust further on the sea that quelled it with its vastness and magnificence. But I never let him see my writings. These were often developments of what I had been fired into saying when with him (I never, I am glad to know, merely developed what he said), but I shrank from displaying them before him, nevertheless. I shrank even the more because they meant so much to me. My dreams altered, and I began to crave for authorship, for literary expression of my growing soul, with a lust that was insatiable. It slowly and inevitably began to devour the whole semblance of the earth for me.

It was partly this, I think, induced the better portion of my book purchases. My reading was often a painfully slow matter, but yet I purchased without any abatement of zeal. Books I could not find time to read it was good to see stand with an aspect full of pride on my shelves. Moreover, though I could not read them (stout, portentous tomes, some of them!) it is incredible the amount I derived from browsing continually through their pages. At any rate, I added steadily to their stock.

Aunt Mary's tongue was not slow in finding this new raw flesh to whip on. I know it puzzled her to think where the money came from for their purchase. But I had had a rare assistance. Mr. Ramsay had devised what I cannot but consider a most deft way of expressing his thanks for my small hint leading to the doubling of his earnings. He had introduced me to his bookseller, who, when Mr. Ramsay had gone, had informed me that I was, for the next two years, to have what books I wished at half-price. My thanks Mr. Ramsay would not have, but I was touched deeply. And when one adds to that the fact that I never bought new ties, that I dispensed with gloves, that I purchased cheaper clothes and denied myself more than the barest luncheons,

the mystery is partly expounded. But nothing of this did Aunt Mary know, and so, knowing little, she whipped the more keenly and assiduously.

Tim knew. I told him nothing, and he asked nothing, but he never seemed to fail in knowledge. Of course he knew nothing of Mr. Ramsay's wonderful gift, but he knew of our friendship, and he knew of my willing self-denial.

"Nice stuff this, eh? Brown's a bit of all right, what's say?" he asked once as he stood clad in a new suit.

I concurred simply, for I knew what he meant, and I knew his shrewd, rat-like eye was on me.

I knew, too, that he who never changed, whatever his habiliment, years or company, he who was the same as on the first morning I had met him and received my first instructions from him, implied a criticism of me, a criticism that was conceived in perplexity. And yet it was he who threw open the door that made urgent the realisation of all that was gathering together its strength in me.

VII

LOVE

The progress of a soul has its own laws, and to say that a thing has laws is, though few see it clearly, not an explanation of it, but its reference to a definite and active governance. Here had I, for months, been through a tense soul-struggle: that is the only phrase for it, for the ordinary expressions of education and learning are demonstrably, even foolishly, inadequate: and the result in me was not so much a change of myself (if one may distinguish superfinely) as a further weightening of my potentiality. And that potentiality could not be said truly to exist until something occurred to strike on it and convert it into the flow of Life—from the stuff of Being to

the flow of Life. For that impact I was waiting, and so surely as the preparation for it had come about, so surely would the impact occur. It was in the divine order and destiny of things.

Let me change the figure. The language of Art differs from that of Science chiefly in being comprised of metaphor as distinct from category; in, that is to say, dealing with the oneness of things as opposed to the distinctness of things. One is occupied with Life, the other with Death. Enough of that. Anyway, that being so, the whole value of Life, in its widest significance, depends on a truth of metaphor—for metaphor is either the one and only truth, nothing else being true, or absolute falsehood. So when the word “subliminal” was chosen to express a profound and unintelligible sphere of Being, a whole department of knowledge was suddenly arrested at that choice, and perverted, because of a fundamentally false vision. To say that that mystical portion of a man’s Being that feeds him with such thoughts of might and beauty, and acts for him with such strange power, is beneath him, is beneath the threshold of his reasoning intelligence, is profoundly to misconceive. It is even derogatory. If anything, that portion of being is above and not below consciousness; it is superconscious, not subconscious. But the whole vertical conception suggested by the metaphor is bad because it is false. It is not a matter of up and down, above or beneath. It is rather that the consciousness is the nucleus (perhaps only the present nucleus, but the nucleus) of our Being. Outside the limits of that nucleus, Being is astral; within those limits, mundane. The knowledge acquired outside those limits transcends, and is too wide for, the function of language, for language is the mundane invention of that nucleus. Such ultra-conscious knowledge, such astral intimations, when conveyed to the intellectual pivot of being, can only be rendered in the metaphors, imagery and emotional rhythm of Poetry. In fact, as I now admit, this is the distinction between Poetry and Prose: Poetry being astral and significant, Prose mundane and reasonable.

I am at some pains to explain all this that seems to me so clear, for I have come to a point in my life that I cannot make intelligible without an intelligent appreciation of it. A considerable part of the business of Art is to build up in the

terms of consciousness this ultra-conscious knowledge. To the artist who makes it, and in a lesser degree to the soul that appreciates it, it passes the centre of being through violent and intense crises, the results of which are to bring more and more of ultra-consciousness into understanding, and so build up the temple of personality. In so far as it achieves this, it is an end in itself, and the term didacticism loses its meaning. We cannot deny Life, even if we would : the denial of Life is the only insanity, whether it be the vile, commercial worship of mundanity on the one hand, or the far more conceivable desire to cancel the conscious being. And this, it seems to me, is Life : to build up a vast and splendid temple of personality by bringing more and more of the astral self into conscious and spontaneous unity : by, in fact, making the nucleus an epitome of the whole Being. This can chiefly be done by the ritual and spiritual discipline of Art, though it may be achieved by independent soul-cataclysms and soul-struggles.

Now it was some such thing that had happened in me. I had been driven forward impetuously along this line of development. The new worlds within which I had been advanced were the worlds of my own ultra-conscious self. Or, as I would rather put it, spasms of Life were passing over my whole Being, and I, becoming aware of them, sought to bring the whole field I felt, and knew not, into conscious control. Night after night I had struggled and wrestled, either reading, when much that I read was valueless to me, being beside the point, or writing, which was far more satisfactory, however formless the result may have been. I had been in the pangs of labour. Now I had reached a point when all the accumulation of the ultra-conscious that had been gathered within my intellectual being needed to be educed by some need for action before it should be dissipated or slip away again. It needed only to be thrilled and transmuted into the terms of my conscious, though yet and always spontaneous, being. It needed some kind of action, or it could not be said to be.

And, as I have said, it was the immovable Tim Larkin, of perhaps a different order of being, who, in the irony of things, brought me the inevitable appeal from the world in which this life is cast.

Our visits to Soho to dinner still took place. I could not spare much time for them. I had my treasured visits to Mr. Ramsay, that nothing could abrogate, but that yet took up as much time as I could afford. Each day seemed important to me now, especially when it be remembered that I had virtually only my evenings to myself. I say "virtually" advisedly. As no one who knows anything of "business" life needs to be told, the amount of time wasted is simply colossal. My hours were officially from 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., a good third to a half of which time was immortal waste. So it is everywhere. But such waste, in the struggle I was undergoing, seemed to me a sacrilege—as, truly, it is. Therefore I used to take up my book, and get through many a page on the quiet at the office. I honestly believe Uncle Jacob would have considered this a dishonest waste of his time, instead of the vile system with which he thumbscrewed his staff being an immortal and irreparable waste of theirs! I used to make a note of soul-important passages (I abhor marking books: why should the pangs of one hour's growth be made a groove for all time?) and re-read these at home.

Yet the nervous tension would sometimes be too much for me. Often of an evening, on a pretext of going out to post a letter, I would fly out in wild excitement to find some girl I knew, or some other whom I knew not but who was willing to remedy that defect with me, "to sport with Amaryl-lis in the shade" of some dusky walk, "or with the tangles of Neaera's hair" in discreet seclusion. They thought me an odd boy, I know, and would regard me askance at first, thinking, I suppose, that a boy who chose such strange subjects for conversation, and spoke with such queer affectations, might or might not be as sane as he should be, but was clearly not of their set. But after the first quarter of an hour my impetuousness wore them down, and at the risk of a show of insufferable egotism, I must confess there were many broken hearts as a result of my nocturnal amorousness. I do not laugh at it; I am, and have often been, thoroughly grieved at it; for in one or two cases I have been borne in a memory of pain for years, as I had to discover. But what was I to do? It was not that I was not in earnest. I was in deadly earnest. Only that earnestness was not of the marriage sort, if I may express it so. I was deeply touched, but not in the

right place. In two cases, of more than ordinary significance to me, the fault was chiefly a matter of rough hands and inaccurate aspirates.

Apart from these spontaneous outbreaks, my visits to Mr. Ramsay, a very occasional theatre, and a still more rare visit to Soho for dinner with Tim, were all that I knew of dissipation. Friends I had none, and as Frank soon began to gather together a company of warm friends in the neighbourhood, I became lonelier and lonelier. Sometimes it afflicted me keenly, but usually I did not mind it. There were very few who liked me at first flush, and as there were few who bothered about proceeding further than the first flush, I began to gather an unenviable reputation—a reputation that Aunt Mary sedulously fostered. While I throve, or attempted to thrive, on my chosen way, this passed me unscathed, but when I stayed awhile, wearied and perhaps depressed, it stung my sensitiveness as salt on a wound. At such times I turned to the faithful Tim, and we went to Soho to dinner, where I exchanged for four courses and a bottle of wine rather more than the value of a half-crown.

The invitations for such occasions were usually left to me, and Tim would acquiesce as though he expected it when it came. Latterly, indeed, I think he actually, uncannily, did indeed expect them. Once he himself suggested it.

"What about to-night, I say?" he asked after having chewed the top of his pen contemplatively for some time.

Now he must have divined it. I had been struggling on that question the whole morning, longing for a rest, and yet begrudging it.

"Don't mind," I replied nonchalantly.

"You're a cough-drop, I may say."

"What do you mean?"

Our questions and answers were like slow droppings in water, clear and sharp, with long silences between.

"Well, ain't you?"

"Foh!"

"Your's head's altering."

This news struck a strange elation in me. It encouraged me somehow.

"Oh!" I said, non-committally.

"It's a better shape, I will say." This he said slowly and

very grudgingly. "Much better shape, oh yes! But what it's like inside, God knows! Fair messed up, I should say. Stirred up, with leavings, like Giorgio's soup." Giorgio was the patrone of our usual Soho restaurant, and the soup that Tim had in mind was a wonderful and bewildering concoction. "And only twenty-three," he went on, though how he learnt of my age and doings I never could discover. "What it'll be like soon—pew! And why you can't come out, wanting it, without scratching your head over it, and getting your works tied up for two days on end, I can't think for one, I will say."

I suppose I had been fretting for it for some days, but I had not been aware of it. It was seldom Tim grumbled with me. He was habitually almost taciturn nowadays, having lost much of that gaiety with me through which his originality flashed. I presume it was owing to my increasing habit of reading during office hours. Twice he had heard Uncle Jacob's step, and warned me when I had caught nothing, and such alert hearing struck me as being due to a habit of watchfulness. The two things, I think, must have been obverse and reverse of the same coin of his mind. The coin, I may say, was but of a recent mintage.

So that night as we set off he seemed to take charge of me as though responsible for me, until I became aware of the situation and took the lead with forced gaiety. A kind of plethora of material had gathered in my soul, coagulating its fluids, stopping its ingresses and egresses, and crying out for the word of action. I must have seemed dulled and stupid. It is in such moods that men seek vice from a healthy instinct, as though instinctively recognising the need of some kind of violence.

Giorgio hailed us gladly.

"Oh, Mr. Elthorne, you are the stranger. Mr. Ramsay, he was in yesterday, and he have asked for you."

It was just such a night as February in London can give. Our walk had well warmed us, and therefore we were less inclined to notice it, but the interior of the *Turin* recalled it to us. The evening journals told of blizzards in the north of England and spoilt skating in the east, but all that day, in London, instead of snow, a driving sleet had fallen, until the evening had wrought the accumulated discomfort to the

actual point of misery. It was, in fact, just such a night as drives a certain portion of London's inhabitants to seek an adventitious pleasure in the haunts of Soho. Some of the more restless of the suburban inhabitants were of that number, but it was chiefly comprised of those who house in solitary lodgings of sorts. In the long, thin, white-painted room that Giorgio was endeavouring to lift into fame, we could see men by themselves, men with one another, men with wives, both obvious and not so patent, and men with companions of the gentler sex that had clearly been acquired not much earlier in the evening for a more or less prolonged consorting. There were also not a few women by themselves or with one another. Altogether the restaurant was quite full, and Tim and I were momentarily chagrined at not being able to get our customary table for two. So we sat ourselves at a corner table where one of the gentler sex was having her dinner in solitary estate. I tried to get Tim to sit opposite her, a ruse that was quickly divined by him, and as repugnantly baulked. I suppose, he thought himself an object of ridicule to women; at any rate he could not tolerate their presence if they were at all stylishly attired, as this one was.

"Rotten, I call it," he whispered to me as we sat down.

"What is?" I asked.

"Full up like this." It was obvious he was in discomfort, and it amused me a little. That we were hot after the walk, and the entrance from the cold air, did not help him.

"Fudge! I like it. It makes things a bit gay."

"I don't s'pose."

"So it does. You're too devilish touchy."

He said something rude.

The wine, always, was my charge, and I ordered the usual bottle of Beaune while Tim was wriggling about in evident discomfort, and with more than a tendency to be quarrelsome.

"I say, let's hurry, and get out for a walk," he whispered again.

"On a night like this! You go to Bath!"

"Well, it's rotten, as I may say."

"Rotten yourself."

What happened next, I cannot quite say. I heard the gentle and gratifying gurgle of the wine into Tim's glass as he sat to

the left of me, and, as I helped myself to some olives, I saw the black reflex of his arm push itself out. Then a crimson-purple tide swept into my line of sight, and, like a small wave, leapt the edge of the table into the lap of the lady opposite.

I jumped to my feet.

"I say, Tim, this is a bit thick!—I'm frightfully sorry, madam. I say, Tim.—Here, take this serviette; never mind your handkerchief. I'm awfully sorry."

A quick colour of annoyance possessed the girl's face for an instant. Then as she looked across at my manifest concern it seemed to pause in abeyance. In the swift passage of that one glance I remember it travelling across me and over my shoulder, when a smile came into her blue eyes and wrinkled her cheek. I was too concerned with mopping up the wine from the cloth, while Giorgio concerned himself with the girl's skirt, to pay much heed to this at the time, but I think now it must have been the picture of the crestfallen and helpless Tim that wrought that smile. It was not unkindly.

"It doesn't matter," she said, "it will wash."

"Will it wash?" I asked anxiously and dubiously.

"I suppose so. But it can't be helped. It was an accident." The last words were said to Tim, who stood sheepishly, with his fingers plucking at his trousers.

The meal was a silent and abashed affair. Even I felt as though the whole of the restaurant were watching us, while Tim's awkwardness was so complete that he had not a word to say for himself. I need not say that this was a rare thing for Tim.

Therefore I was not altogether surprised when, after his fruit, instead of pulling out his great pipe as usual, he fumbled about for a moment or so, and then said:

"Think I'll go. Coming?"

"No, I think I'll stay on a bit."

I felt his reproach, but I had certain reasons for staying moving uneasily about me.

"Well, so long!"

"You'd better stop on as ordinary." I wonder if I would have said that had I not been certain he was resolved on going! He had, in fact, risen, and was standing above me.

"No, I'm going." There was still invitation in his voice,

but I held firm. "So long!" he said resolvedly, even defiantly.

"So long!" I responded.

"See you to-morrow, s'pose?"

"Expect so."

Not that there was ever a doubt of it, but men throw stones into a pond for no assignable reason.

When Tim had gone, I drew my book out of my pocket and pretended to read it. It was, I fear, but a pretence, for my eyes were as frequently over its edge in attendance on the girl opposite me. She was stylishly, not modishly, dressed, as though she had not too much money to dispense, but yet with her little could manage to hold her own somehow with those whose coffers were full of plenty. A certain air of independence, too, she had, that gave distinction to her bearing, combining with a nervous fire in her motions. She was thin, over-thin for her build, and looked clever in an alert way. Her hair, so much of it as I could see, was light brown, and her eyes, I remembered from that quick glance of hers, pale blue.

So much I took in as I watched her. Presently she looked up from a paper-backed novel she was reading. My heart beat a violent rataplan on my ribs as I firmly held her gaze with mine. She smiled slightly.

"I am afraid my friend spoilt your dress," I said quickly, lest she should look away again, and a fair reason for a remark be lost.

"I had forgotten it," she said, looking down at her dress.

"Does it show a stain?" I asked, leaning over.

"A bit, yes," she replied, displaying it.

As I had leaned over I had caught the scent of her clothes, with the result that my pulse became a most uneven affair. Nevertheless, an opening for a conversation had occurred that could not be neglected—nay, it was even imposed on me. So I passed, awkwardly at first, and then more naturally, into more general themes, and so back again to more particular themes, of conversation. I offered her a cigarette, which she duly smoked. I noticed that she had nothing to drink and offered another bottle of wine. This she refused but took a Benedictine instead. I had, I should say, allotted a certain sum of money for my outing, and even this had meant the

postponement for a month of a certain book I coveted. But such considerations had no weight now. They were not even irrelevant, for they were not thought of. I had plunged into the stream, and intended, willy-nilly, letting the bountiful, life-giving tide have its way with me.

At last she started drawing on her gloves. "I must really go now," she said.

Again my blood began its furious course in my veins.

"Where do you live, may I ask?" I spoke quickly.

"Why do you want to know?" she said, smiling across at me.

"I just do," I said, encouraged by the smile, though not less resolved to discover.

"Kilburn way," she said, fencing with me.

"I've got to go that way," I said.

"Have you?" It was wonderful the musical doubt she put into her voice.

"Really."

"That's nice for you."

"It is, for I'm going with you—if I may?"

"But you're not coming now?"

"At once." I rose as I spoke.

"But you really mustn't."

I made no reply but reached down my coat from its peg, while the waiter rushed to help me.

"One bill," I said—maybe defiantly. I had a sovereign in my pocket, and that, and that only, was the limit to my venture.

"No, no!" she said.

"But you see, we spoilt your dress, spilt the wine, you know," I stammered, clutching at the first excuse that came into my mind.

"It's really very sweet of you," she said, and again her smiling music made my brain to flutter.

It was no more than an adventure in my mind the whole time, though an adventure on more resplendent heights than could be afforded by Heath Road. It was the more exhilarating for that, but no more permanent.

Outside the sleet still drove along the streets. It was bitterly cold coming out of the *Turin* with raw winds laden with what looked like small rain yet stung the cheek fiercely.

"Which way do you go?" I asked, for my geography of London was of the baldest.

"By bus," she said, and I caught the shiver in her voice on the imagination of a dark, damp, lumbering horse-bus up that long, wind-swept road.

"Let us have a hansom!" I cried bravely.

"All right," said she, and began looking about. Then she burst out: "But aren't I taking you out of your way?"

"Not a bit," I answered stoutly.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite!"

The bleakness of the night necessitated the enclosing of the hansom, and I therefore, a little over-eagerly, demanded it. Thus we were secure from observation, and again my blood began its violent music. Her hand touched mine beside me, but before I could secure it, she had slipped it again within her muff. I was a little at odds, not quite sure how to proceed on these more resplendent heights of adventure. But presently the lurch of the hansom threw me up against her, and, for the shave of a minute, I stayed there longer than was necessary, then, turning quickly, I kissed her on the cheek. It was swift and instinctive.

"Now, now, now!" she cried warningly.

The tone in a voice is all; and on the ring of her voice I threw my arms round her and, drawing her to me, kissed her passionately. Kiss upon kiss I pressed on her lips thus, and it seemed to me that she responded. It must have been minutes ere I released her.

"You're all right, aren't you?" she said, settling her hat and tidying her deranged hair.

"Am I?" I asked contentedly, putting my arm about her and drawing her to me again.

"You're a saucy boy, you know."

"It's good to be saucy sometimes."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I am."

Further conversation was hindered by another long series of kisses. It was plain to me that she enjoyed them not less than I. We drew away to look into one another's faces, and then went to it again as to an irresistible fascination.

We were now driving up the long, straight, gleaming road,

and the sleet was driving up against the wind-guard with a long, sharp hiss. The guard was opaque, so covered was it with the sleet.

"Come on my knee!" I said.

"What, for all the people to see?"

"Who can see through that?" I pointed to the guard.

"Oh, but there isn't room!"

"We'll soon make room."

We did, and as she sat upon my knee, I leaned back, drawing her after till we had our fill of kisses. Then I said suddenly:

"But I don't know your name."

"What do you want with my name?"

"But I must have it."

"Must you?"

After the usual questionings and submissions to the customary ritual of guessing (at which I was a little surprised, seeing this was a matter of the resplendent heights) I learnt that her name was Rhoda Ermott. Then, in the intermissions of kissing, to her considerable amusement, I passed through an interrogatory, and discovered that she was a private secretary, that she lived in rooms with a friend who had some position in the post-office, or something connected with the post-office, and that she was twenty-four, a year or so older than myself.

"Now have you finished, Mr. Inquisitive?" she asked.

"Quite," said I.

As she sat on my knee and looked in my face, in the dim illumination of passing lights, she bewildered my brain as it had never yet been bewildered. As she told me of the struggle that she had had, and that she had only one relative, an aunt, a great gush of tenderness came over me, and an infinite hunger and nostalgia. I felt that to return to Hampstead would be impossible, and yet horrible in that it was inevitable. A great yearning and melancholy overcame me, and I pressed her to me as though Life were an unbearable pain. Its whole round of business and circumstance surged before my mind, and frightened me. To have driven so in that vehicle to the end of time, with her upon my knee, with light or earnest talk between us in the intermission of kisses that had become somewhat more than sensual pleasure, seemed to me to have

become suddenly the authentic order of things for us, and the fact that every yard of progress we made was a nearer approach to an end, instead of a mere passage in eternal continuance, appalled me, drove pure despair into my soul.

"What are you so solemn about, Mr. Inquisitive?" she suddenly asked, breaking in on the terrible pictures of my mind.

"We're going to see a lot of one another."

"Are we? Who says so?"

"I do."

"But I don't even know your name yet."

"I suppose you ought to."

"Of course! I told you mine."

"Jack Doherty," I said. "Like it?"

"Why, you're Irish!"

"Absolutely."

"How do you spell it?"

"J-a-c-k!"

"No, silly, the other!"

"D-o-h-e-r-t-y!"

"But what a funny way you pronounce it!"

"Yes, the 'h' should be hard."

She took off my hat, and stroked my hair back. "You're rather nice," she said.

"Why then, we shall see a lot of one another!"

She laughed merrily and easily. "Perhaps. But not just now, I think."

"What do you mean?" I asked, quailing suddenly with fear.

"I'm nearly home, dear boy!"

It was not what I feared, but it was almost as desolating.

"Oh, why can't we go on like this!" I cried.

She caught the drift of my emotion, but turned away from it. I caught her to me for a long kiss in a sudden aching of heart.

"You silly boy!" she said, sitting upright, and replacing my hat decorously on my head.

Then, as the hansom turned out of the high road, she moved off my knee, despite my protests, and began to array her somewhat disordered hat and hair. I watched her in silent admiration, and something moving secretly within me gave me to

know that this had become more than an adventure, or rather, that it was an adventure of a new order, whose conclusion was shrouded in the days to be. That shrouding appalled me. A wild joy possessed me, but it was a joy everywhere mixed with a melancholy of desolation. It seemed to me terrible that I should go from her alone to that house in Hampstead; but more, far more, it seemed to me terrible that she should be alone to combat in the world, without me to bulwark and aid her, though she would doubtless have laughed merrily at so strange a notion.

Despite the blizzard we hung long again on one another's lips before we parted. Then, when she was gone in, I realised it was long past midnight, and that I had no other course than to tramp to Hampstead. And when I tiptoed into the tall, dark, cold house, and crept into a chill bed, it was not the cold that kept me unwontedly awake long and late.

VIII

THE OPENING OF A HOPELESS WAR

The following morning as I came in, late as usual, to my breakfast, Aunt Mary held me with her eye. Uncle Jacob had already departed, and I could feel I had been the subject of conversation.

"What time were you in last night, Jacob?"

"Oh, after twelve!" I said. Breakfast was always a scramble for me, and I used this as a cover. My eyes were full of sleep, and I felt drawn and tired, facts that had not even been shaken out of me by my cold tub, and which I knew were testifying against me.

"But what time?" To my infinite relief she accepted the hour as being only usually late for such occasions, and chose

to fight the customary issue on that understanding. It gave quite a lift to my spirits.

"I don't know. I went straight to bed, and didn't look at the time. I caught one of the last busses." I threw her this admission so as to keep her off the further lateness. Better a very black sheep than an actual goat, I thought.

There was silence for a moment, then she rang out: "Why don't you tell me the truth?"

I had come down cold to the bone, but at her words my coldness became far more than merely a physical matter.

"What do you mean?" I asked, bending over cold coffee. She never bothered about keeping breakfast warm for me.

"You're going to say you took your friend Tim to dinner."

"And I did," I flashed out. Unalterable truth rang out in my voice, and I had sufficient of histrionic instinct to rise from breakfast as I spoke. I could see Aunt Mary was impressed, therefore I did not much heed her when she said sturdily:

"I don't believe a word of your lies."

Her violence did not hurt me, for I knew it meant that she was beaten on the issue and strengthened herself artificially. But as I hastened out of the room her departing words did not fail to catch at me with fear.

"I shall have to get your uncle to treat with you."

I crept past Uncle Jacob's room at the office, which meant that he did not know, nor would be able to find out, that I was late. But when I was called in to my morning interview, something in his eye and manner made me know that all was not well. This fact, roving in the air as it was, and picked up surely by me, made it impossible for me to fight his dominance as I had been in the habit of doing, with the result that for the first time for many days he bullied me ruthlessly, and finally drove me out of his room in a devouring flame of anger, flinging my papers after me.

"Idle whelp!" he roared out. "Crass fool! Here, take your papers! Don't leave your stupid rubbish with me! There's nothing done right in this house except I superintend it. Everything comes on me. Here, go, go! Pick up your papers, you fool of a boy, and get back to your idling."

The whole house could have heard him, and Mr. Tozer's face, coming up the stairs to see him after me, was a picture

in its misery of anticipation. I was insulted and angered, without the spirit to rebel. I was tired, and the thought of what Rhoda Ermott might be doing or thinking (whether she was thinking of me, or had heartlessly put me out of mind) tormented me. She had said we were not to meet till the following week, and when I got to my small office I occupied the rest of the morning with writing her a long, impassioned letter, begging her to meet me somewhere for the Saturday afternoon.

My state may be imagined when I say that it was not till the Monday I received any reply from her. My visits to the post-office where I had asked her to address my letters had, in those days between, been pilgrimages of a torment of hope and fear. When I at last received her letter I bore it away, trembling, to a tea-shop to read it. It bore a Midland post-mark, a fact that filled me with torturing imaginations. But the letter was brief and neatly phrased. She said that she had received my letter, and that I was a silly boy. She was sorry she could not meet me on the Saturday, but that her employer had had to go on some business to the Midlands, and that she had had to accompany him. (The very thought of her being with another man drove my thought into a frenzy: I do not know what evil I did not imagine, and picture before my eyes, with torture to me.) She went on to say that she did not know how long she would have to be there, but that she would write to me letting me know—which meant that our appointment for that week was cancelled.

If there was one thing needed to make my passion of an eternal die it was this. I do not think that for one consecutive period of five minutes during all that week she left my thoughts. The desolation and pain of it was scarce bearable. She haunted me, and I always, in an intensity of fond tenderness, imagined her as over-pressed with the burthen of living, when probably she was gaiety itself, and would have been vastly amused at my imaginings. Yet so it was. It was her I thought of, her and her life; never, as I am compelled to say for myself, merely or primarily my satisfaction or joy in her, though that was of course indissolubly mixed in it.

In the meantime other matters were afoot. All things seemed, strangely, to be chancing together. The very night

after I had first met Rhoda, while the picture of her face as she had sat on my knee was yet before my eye, fired by my imaginings of her struggle in life and stung by the recognition of my helplessness and dependence on Uncle Jacob, I had despatched my first attempts to get into print. I had sent an essay to a weekly paper, and a short story, of a mystical sort, to a magazine. The night of the day on which I received her letter I sent off two more. Such were, as it were, my first attempts to spring into a world of self-dependence, which was also the world of my hopes and ambitions. Then there came also the application of the prick behind.

How I remember it ! It is vivid as it were yesterday. On the night following my second hopeful despatch of manuscripts that were the flame of my soul, as we sat at dinner, some topic of political importance was started. I have a dim remembrance that it was a general election time. Henry, who had grown to be quite friendly of late, made some statement in the course of conversation that I took exception at. He was now in the business, filling my old post in charge of the despatch of samples and proposed designs to intending customers, which accounted partly for our better friendship, and also for his acquaintance with my political opinions. I imagine his remark, therefore, was thrown out, in no ill spirit, to draw me. It certainly did draw me. I crossed his opinion, I fear, emphatically and somewhat energetically. Politics are seldom a matter of reason. Their convictions spring from temperament, right or wrong, moral or non-moral, beautiful or ugly : their rightness or otherwise must therefore date from the worth of those temperaments, and so I did not, could not, reason a case ; I stated it, and doubtless stated it with that kind of assurance that Mr. Ramsay was kindly and tender with, even respected and attended to, but which was gall to Aunt Mary. While I spoke, I thought of none, but when I ceased, I felt suddenly awkward and diffident and self-conscious. There was a moment's silence. Then Aunt Mary spoke.

" So, Jacob," she said coolly, " you are going to be a great literary man ; is that so ? "

The effect was electrical. Uncle Jacob, who had been dreaming at the head of the table, sprang instantly to attention. Frank and Henry, from each side, turned quickly on me. And I—well, first I turned red, and then, as I knew and felt,

turned ghastly white, trembling in my limbs and grieving in my spirit.

"Oh yes," went on my tormentor. "I know; I've seen the reams and reams of writing in your drawer. There's not so much there now. Been sending some off?"

It was a worthy ambition, was it not? Yet here was the whole table looking on me as though I were a mixture of buffoon and criminal!

But I was staggered and confused. This discovery, with the treachery it implied, made all the earth insecure to me, wholly apart from the eyes of bewilderment and amusement that were turned on me. I thought I had been tunnelling beneath the earth, for my works not to appear till I had reached my destination, then to be only manifest in their achievements, not in their tentative efforts; and now the earth had ruthlessly been broken away, and I was blinking at the day, with curious eyes gazing amusedly down at me. The blow aimed at me had struck me deeply, it had struck the tender secrecy of my soul, the sensitive raw of my spiritual progress and ideals. And my whole being quivered. Words cannot express my sense of humiliation and defeat.

What passed during the rest of that meal I cannot say. After it was over I fled to my room, and, taking all my manuscripts, the pangs in labour of my soul, I shut them down under lock and key in my old school trunk. Then I fled out into the night. As I went softly out of the front door, closing it after me gently with the latchkey in the lock, I heard Uncle Jacob enquiring after me. But I had gone.

Soft faces and reluctant lips could not tempt me that night. I walked and ran alternately till I was weary. And I called aloud on Rhoda Ermott, not blind to the fact that she had doubtless abolished me from her mind long since.

The following morning two long envelopes awaited me on the breakfast-table. They were my first returned manuscripts. I endeavoured to look oblivious of Aunt Mary's scrutiny as I slipped them nonchalantly into my breast pocket.

Later that morning Uncle Jacob took advantage—automatic, instinctive advantage, be it said—of my listlessness to hale me to and fro as I do not suppose even Mr. Tonson had ever been. I was still the same man as had for some two years forced his conquering, dominating spirit back upon himself,

and compelled him firmly to desist from tyrannising unduly over me, or else I think my feebleness would have tempted him to strike me. As it is he flung harmless papers at me. But his insults had now all a double edge, and it was this that gave him the marked ascendancy over me. I quivered at his new references to my waste of time, for I knew now what further he had in mind when he said it, and I had no answer to his insinuations of my total incapacity for business and its common sagacity, though I knew, and knew that he knew, their deliberate untruth.

If I was listless before I saw him, I was thoroughly depleted after. I looked disconsolately over the hideous chimney-pots at the back of my room that civilisation has erected as its adequate temple of praise, where in the near distance I could see glimpses of the Thames as it glided like lead beneath a chill February sun.

"You look fair washed out, son!" I heard a voice.

"Feel like it," I said.

"Rough crossing?"

"Damn and blast him!"

"Everybody does who sees the enemy, I may say. Look fair washed out, I mean. Proper washed out and thin. Huh, he makes me creep. Glad I don't have to see him."

I did not pay much attention to his words, but he comforted me.

"S'pose if I saw him he'd sneak my pink too. Couldn't be worse if he proper sucked you, I may say. Huh!"

A blinding light swept on my brain as he spoke. It dazzled and horrified me. And almost before I had seen it it was gone again.

"My God!" I exclaimed, staring across at him.

"What's the matter, eh?"

"Nothing!"

"Look as if you'd seen a ghost, son!"

"I believe I had," I said.

He said nothing, but looked oddly at me; but I had seen something that gave me a puzzled, if horrified, interest, and as I had seemed beaten and broken all ways, this brought me help, for it gave my thought something to work upon and follow out. I determined to watch Uncle Jacob, and to watch myself when with him, in our future interviews; and it made

me resolve, grimly and determinedly resolve, not to cease to oppose him mentally with all possible doggedness, whatever my defeat or depression, for I felt, blindly as yet, that immeasurable and incommunicable issues lay hinged on that.

In the evening after dinner he summoned me to his study. I went in somewhat fearfully, yet doggedly determined not to be fearful. Half-knowing what I did, I looked with horrible fascination on his glossy hair, his glistening eye, his full red lips and his richly-coloured complexion (all in the setting of a not indelicate profile), and so I was distracted from the main purport of the interview, of which I was fully aware directly he had spoken to me.

"Why do you distress me in this continual way, boy?" he began in a voice that seemed to whinny.

I heard him. I did not answer or say anything, for at first my thoughts were far afield; and then, when I brought myself to the occasion, I held myself in silence for the greater strength.

"Always you cause me some anxiety, and it is too much for me. What's this now I hear from your aunt?"

Still I held myself in silence. It was a thing he never reproached me for: his method of attack was that of bitter complaint or terror, in sharp contrast to Aunt Mary, who relied on speech from the other side till her moment came. It was chiefly this that gave her the ascendancy over him. She loved being the effectual styptic; he loved being the effectual torrent.

"Is it not enough that I have taken you up, in kindness, in a desire for kindness, at least, and put you into my own firm, when there was no necessity for me to have done anything, without you wasting all my efforts in this foolish, this wicked, way? I don't pretend that now it is only kindness, for you have now a value in my firm, and I am glad, very glad, to give you that tribute." This was his way of saying, I suppose, that a pound a week was a fifth of what he would have had to pay a stranger to do in my place! "But now see how you go and spoil all the value of what you do! What do you mean by it, boy? It is a great worry to me."

At this pause he seemed to expect an answer, but I did not give it to him.

"It is not for me to say that a literary career is not a worthy

one. No, no, don't think I mean that ! But what chances of success have you ? Are you going to say you have talent or genius : are you ? You know, and it pains me to say it, you have altogether a false notion of yourself. Your aunt finds your manners most unbearable, and you have offended many others. You are, I am afraid, egotistical and bombastic, but if you go and run away with a false notion of yourself in a conceited, swollen-headed way, you will not only pain us all but you will wreck your whole life. Believe me, I know what I am talking about. I am much older than you, and I have watched things for myself. My life has thrown me into a specially advantageous position, and I have met a great many men of the highest eminence as well as a great many men who have spoilt their lives, and the lives of others, with a false conceit of themselves. For one thing, are you prepared for the years, perhaps a lifetime, of penury and actual starvation it might mean ? Besides all this, you must recognise that you receive a salary from me for your work, and I cannot have you spending your efforts, and tiring and fagging yourself, and not giving your true work, your best self. It is your duty to do so, and I must very firmly stop all this."

There lay the true fault, thought I. Still I did not reply.

"What is all this writing your aunt speaks of ?"

"I don't understand what she means," I said. I had had time to collect myself during his harangue. "Some of it was French exercises, and others passages from Ruskin's essays on Art."

This made him fall back on himself, I could see. He began again warily :

"Let me see them !"

"I burned them yesterday."

He eyed me suspiciously. "Are you telling me the truth ?" he asked.

"Uncle !" I exclaimed. I must have had histrionic possibilities, for it was excellently well said.

And there was genuine indignation in it too ! There are lies that are perversions of truth, but there are also lies that are the protection and maintenance of the soul's proper privacy, which is itself of the essence of truth. I will never sell a secret of my soul at the price of lip-service to a code.

It was my only means of holding off a soul-robber. I used the means and held him off.

"Well, I am very pleased to hear it. I like you to read Ruskin. He will be very useful to you, though you must beware of his tendencies to decry much that is very beautiful. Some parts of him are very dangerous. But that you can work out for yourself."

It was curious to notice how he interpreted everything in terms of the profit of Messrs. Mueler, Ltd. But I did not then object to that : I was congratulating myself on having escaped certain most dangerous shoals and endeavouring to continue to look aggrieved and not pleased.

"Will you have a cigarette ?"

He had some excellent Turkish cigarettes at his hand, but he went to his desk to produce a box of cheap Virginians. I took one, with thanks to him, and lit and smoked it as though I had not some of his own brand of Turkish in my pocket.

When I reached my room Frank was there. While we smoked together he endeavoured to find what my interview was about. But my hand was against everybody, and I let him gather that it was only some trouble in the business. At last he went, and I reached down a book to read. Then he stood in the door again.

"I say, Jack, I got a rise to-day. From the first of March, it begins. Two quid a week ; not so dusty, eh ?"

I thought of Rhoda, and I sickened at the thought of our contrast.

"Good for you !" I said. "Perkins is a good chap." Perkins was his chief.

"I'm terribly bucked. We must have a lunch on it."

"I'm glad," I said, and I fear I lied. "Congratulations !"

"Well, good-night, old chap !"

"Good-night, old man !"

Before I turned in to bed I covered my stipulated five pages, but I do not think I read one line of them.

IX

RHODA ERMOTT

I remember once playing at the royal and ancient game of chess when a most interesting situation arose. My queen was threatened, and my opponent's queen was also threatened, ungallantly, by my knight. He had ripened a strong movement on my king, a movement that was dependent on his queen, while I could deliver a swift attack on his king, an attack that should have checkmated him in four moves, as I reckoned, with my knight, by moving it away from his queen. The attack would have been like nothing so much as running quickly along a ridge with a precipice each side, but it should have been successful. There is no doubt that had I only been unaware of the subsidiary complications I would have brought off the main movement, but I was aware of too much, thought of too much, and failed in all.

It was much like this with me now, with this difference, that my central concern so absorbed my whole emotional life that all the auxiliary complications arising on every hand either made no impression on me or became only as fuel to feed the essential fire. Ordinarily on the discovery of my literary ambitions I would have fled down to Mr. Ramsay, given him the confidence that was bound to be his sometime, and sought his advice. Indeed it occurred to me. But it was forgotten again in the burning hunger for Rhoda.

I was aware of the fact that my passion for her was as yet unrequited. Nor did it disturb me in the least. There was not a pin point of doubt in me that I could win her to respond fully in due time. The assurance, however, did not make me patient; it filled me with the most violent and intolerable impatience. Actual cries of pain would be wrung from me when I thought of her away from me and not thinking of me. Once Tim caught such a cry of mine. It had risen to my throat in an absent dream of pain, to be held and throttled there only half-effectually. The noise must have been an odd one, and I felt him looking at me so queerly that I sprang up and went out forthwith to lunch, to his considerable and increased astonishment.

What evils I imagined for her I do not know. All that

horrible fear that our modern vile, commercial system has driven into the hearts of men, blasting their daily happiness, and blighting their souls; the fear of the future, of dismissal, of want, of poverty that is a shame and generally leads to a deeper and more real shame, possessed me on her behalf. To be true, it was as near to me as to her, but it was of her I thought. She was alone and a woman. So it ramified abroad and ate my days in the maw of its melancholy.

Then came the liberating stroke! It was on the Saturday of the week thereafter. I had left the office and, before going home, made my daily pilgrimage to the post-office near handy. I had given up sneaking in like a self-conscious criminal, for now I had all my correspondence addressed to that office, leaving nothing to Aunt Mary's capricious honour; and therefore, in an assortment of divers handwritings, my love was secure from the conjecture of post-office girls.

"Nothing!" said the girl, but as I turned heroically away, her companion said: "Just a minute! I think there's a telegram just come!"

A telegram! I snatched it open outside and read:

"Returning to-day. Will write to-night about next week.
"RHODA."

My movements were swift and prompt. The telegram, I saw, had been despatched from the Midland station of the town she was at: obviously she was then on her way back. I dashed to my bookseller's close by and borrowed a timetable. There I saw that a train to London left ten minutes after the telegram had been sent, and was due to arrive in two hours' time. I immediately telephoned to Frank and asked him to notify at Hampstead that I would not be back till later, as I was going to the theatre.

"Do you think it wise?" said he.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know you're in a bit of hot water about something or other, and—well, you know."

"Oh, blow them! Why should I be tied by them?"

"You do what you think best, of course."

It was a discreet and perceiving caution of Frank's, but it failed, as such cautions are often apt to do, because it

disregarded the dominant law abroad in me. There was plenty of time for me to observe all leisure, but I snatched a hasty lunch and fled up to St. Pancras station. Then I strode up and down the platform till the train came in.

As the people flowed down the platform I scanned them eagerly. But they floated away like a mist and no Rhoda was to be discovered. I read her telegram again and assured myself of the station. Then I asked a porter of the next train. I would wait every train of that day, if need were, I said to myself. In three-quarters of an hour another train-load of passengers swarmed on the platform, and thinned away like a mist. With an overwhelming feeling of disappointment I waited on so till after six. Grimness and doggedness had taken the place of hope.

When, soon after six, another train came in, I tried to convince myself that this would no more hold her than any of the others had; that, in fact, she must have already arrived by some other route. But, as it passed me, I saw her face in a forward window. When she stepped out on to the platform I was acutely disappointed. Instead of her imagined loveliness, I saw she was thin, even perhaps a little sharp. Even her prettiness seemed less so to me who had thought of her as all beauty. Yet, with all my disappointment, I would have freely chosen her at that moment before all the loveliness of the world, and the choice would not have sprung from loyalty but from inevitability. I was disappointed; but I yearned for her, hungered for her. It was she I wanted, though I could have wished her nearer the substance of my dreams.

There was a man with her, tall, thin, and with an air of distinction. I hated him on sight.

She had not seen me, nor did she see me till I deliberately placed myself before her line of sight. Then her look plainly intimated that I was to take no notice of her as yet. So I waited till the man had gone to attend to their luggage, when I ran to her side,

"Rhoda! My dear! my dear!"

"My dear boy, you shouldn't have come here."

"I've been here over four hours!"

"The more fool you!"

"Rhoda!"

"No, I don't mean that. But I can't see you now."

"But you must, you must. We must go and have dinner together."

"I can't. He'll want to see me home."

"Oh, curse him! Rhoda!"

I suppose she must have seen the pain on my face, for in a sudden gush of pity she put her gloved hand on my arm and said:

"Yes, I will. Under the clock in ten minutes' time. Now go, quickly, he's coming back."

I saw him come up to her with an air of proprietary, and I heard him address her by her Christian name. It made me furious. They walked together down the platform, and near the gate they remained long in discussion. He seemed to be endeavouring to get her to bow to his will, such was his insistent manner, and I gathered the nature of the discussion. Then they went off together.

X

STILL RHODA ERMOTT

My heart failed in me when I saw them disappear together round the bend of that dirty, red-brick wall. Nevertheless, in a manner of blind hopefulness, I slowly made my way round to the clock, and waited there as she had bade me do. The ten minutes at last passed by and changed to fifteen, but yet she did not appear. They passed to twenty minutes, and to twenty-five, and I still clung desperately on, scarcely knowing why I did so, save that to do anything else was impossible.

At last I gave a great cry of relief, for with a flutter of skirts she was beside me, her hand on my arm and her face looking up into mine.

"My dear!" I cried out, "I thought you weren't coming!"

"I am sorry," she said, "but he wouldn't let me go."

"But what the deuce has it got to do with him? Hang him!"

"Now don't spoil everything by getting angry!"

There was appeal in her voice, and I was too full of joy at having her at last with me to insist on a theme that nevertheless had taken possession of me.

In the cab, as it fled southwards, I insisted on a kiss. She gave it to me, and had no thought, no more than I had, for the people that doubtless witnessed it. She had begun to be a little caught off her feet, I can see, and carried forward in the torrent that already bore me in its flight.

"But what," said I then, as we rattled into more gaily lit streets, "has that old fool got to do with it? What has it got to do with him if you want to come out with me?"

"He doesn't know I'm with you! Mercy me! I dare never tell him that! Wouldn't his face be a picture!" She laughed at the thought of it.

"But why? Why?—if you only type for him?"

"My dear boy, he wants me to marry him!"

"What?"

"Fact. And I believe he thinks I'm going to."

"Oh dear; oh dear!—You're not going to, though?"

"It certainly would be a relief for a lot of things. He makes a lot of money, you know; and he's not such a bad sort. But fancy marrying your father! Ugh! If it weren't for that——!"

"But—but you don't care for him?"

"In a way, yes! He has been very decent to me, and buys me lots of things. And when we go away together he always does me well."

"Rhoda!" I cried out.

"What's the matter? Don't you like me talking of him?"

"When you go away together you don't——?"

"Don't what?"

"Stay together?"

"Thanks! I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure." She had grown suddenly cold and distant, which was her manner of dignity.

"I'm sorry, Rhoda!" I pleaded humbly.

"It doesn't matter." Her tone implied that it mattered everything.

"I'm a beast, I know."

"I'm afraid you are. Still, it doesn't matter. Where are we going to for dinner? Or shall I go home?"

"Forgive me, Rhoda!"

"There's nothing to forgive. I suppose it's only natural."

"Oh no, it isn't. It was horrible of me, dear!" Man is a composite being. I was genuinely and humbly sorry. And yet I would not have recalled it; for somewhere in my being a secret elation had arisen at the thought that my suggestion would now make her wary of any complication with him.

Since our first meeting I had prosecuted enquiries regarding certain restaurants I had heard of. The *Turin* was out of the question. There I was known, and might easily meet those who knew me. Besides, if possible I wished to be alone with Rhoda, and I had heard of places where this could be achieved. So I had asked at likely looking restaurants in the vicinity, and it was to one of these we now went.

"I've never been in a place like this," she said, looking around the small room, with the table arranged for two, the couch, and flaming wall-paper, with monstrous red patterns on it.

"There are a lot of them about here," I said, with a great affectation of carelessness.

She looked suspicious: there was one thought in both our minds, but we neither of us said anything.

All through dinner we spoke on light themes that mattered nothing to me, and I was content to let it be so, for I had a confession to make, and I was tense with the strain of it. After dinner I drew her on to the couch, and, slipping my arm about her, kissed her tenderly.

"You're a naughty boy bringing me to a place like this," she said.

"It was our only way of being together, and alone," I said. But I continued shamefacedly: "I've a confession to make to you."

"Oh!" said she. "Well, let's have it."

"You know when I told you my name was Jack Doherty. Well, it isn't." She watched me as I spoke, quite quietly. "In a certain sense it is true. I have some of my letters

addressed to me in that name." I did not say that this was only since our meeting, and to cover hers under that name. "But it isn't that, really. It's Jacob Elthorne. I tell you because you ought to know. I couldn't go on under a misunderstanding."

"So you told an untruth to me!" I winced; and she continued more kindly: "Didn't you trust me then? What did you take me for?"

"It wasn't only that, Rhoda, believe me! I wanted rather to be free of Jacob Elthorne, I think: it's tied up with such a lot that I hate."

"But you did distrust me."

"I suppose in a way I did. But there was the other too. It's all so mixed up together. I'm sorry, dear girl. I'd trust you with everything now."

I looked earnestly in her face as I spoke. I bent and kissed her on the lips. Then she smiled suddenly, and, slapping my cheek, said briskly:

"In any case you told me now, didn't you? And you were a good boy to do that. I suppose one has to be careful. Jacob Elthorne, did you say? I like it. I like them both, although the way you pronounce Doherty sounds funny. But I'm going to call you Jack just the same."

"Most people do," I said. My manner was still subdued. It was partly because I felt glad at having brought our relations on to one of frankness. Moreover, somehow, it had wrought a change over her. A new tenderness, an almost motherly tenderness, was manifest in her as she sat beside me and drew my hand between her two and caressed it.

"Never mind, dear boy," she said. "I've forgotten it."

Then a sudden resolve came into my mind. Leaving her side I went over to my coat and drew out three of my abortive attempts to enter into print.

"There!" said I. "There's what nobody in the world knows of besides myself—and now you: not my brother, nor my dearest friend. I vowed nobody should know. But I want no secrets from you now."

She took them from my hand wonderingly, and looked through them.

"Why, Jack," she said, "you're a writer."

"No, I'm not," I replied, half moodily, half awkwardly.

"I've got things in me that I want to get said. But nobody wants them."

"Read them to me," she said suddenly.

"I can't," I exclaimed, "I can't read out my own stuff!" I was crimson with confusion.

I watched her awkwardly, standing over her or moving about, as she took one of the essays and read it. The expression of her face, as far as I could see, never changed as she read, and I trembled a little to think what the result in her would be. Then, after awhile, she looked up slowly at me and said:

"Jack, this is fine!"

God! how it stirred me! Any praise I would have clutched eagerly, painfully, at. But there was a kind of authority in her voice, and there was that which is so much more than authority, there was emotion. It had kindled her.

"I'm glad you like it," I said.

"I—I—yes, I do like it." She was obviously afraid of excess; and that appealed to me most. "It's poetry."

It was a shrewd comment. My thoughts on the respective values of a prose or poetic medium for the expression of a poetic content have changed absolutely since. Then, in a young man's arrogance, I claimed the greater suppleness and freedom of prose for a man's vision. Yet, though I did not know it then, my preoccupation was with a poetic content; it was entangled in all my work, essays or symbolical tales, and it was this that had kindled her. It glowed in her eyes, and I felt humbled to the dust. There was a splendid pride in me, and I sat beside her with tears in my eyes.

"You dear girl," I said, "that's the first encouragement I have ever had." I bowed my head before her.

We were silent for awhile. Then she spoke softly:

"Never mind, Jack! It's bound to come; you're bound to arrive. Anyway, I like them. I'm going to take them home and read them; may I?"

XI

IN WHICH I AM BRACED AND ENCOURAGED

During those days I did no work ; I read persistently, it is true, but mainly in the interstices of other occupation, and my book purchases died away, for my meetings with Rhoda not only drank all my money but actually invaded my small savings. In fact, all the bent and intention of the past years seemed to have been spilled in the sand. To myself, even, it seemed so. But a man trusts most to his instincts in life, and I had the instinct that a purpose was being achieved, that all the potentialities that had been called in within the limits of my mind from the region of the metaphysical self, were being made real by their deployment in action and power, and that the stream would yet, in consequence of all this, resume its course, wider, fuller and richer. I knew nothing, thought nothing, realised scarce anything, but my instincts were alive and were leading aright. Even when I despaired most, was most melancholy—and these things sometimes submerged my whole outlook—I yet had no real doubt of the eventual Destiny : I saw but a glimmer, but I did not doubt whence it came. Above all this, I knew it was myself, with the power of realisation in me, that was the agent and the factor. The destiny was there, but it lay for me to hold on and win it. And I say this for myself, that I never really turned my face to right hand or to left.

There was no firm earth anywhere for me to tread on, and my bed found me an earlier companion than it had for many a day, as the only escape from my distractions. I used often to go to Kilburn to see Rhoda, and my late hours drew Aunt Mary's fiercest attacks on me. Both Rhoda and I (though I could not understand it in her, she being free) seemed to take special delight in proceeding surreptitiously with our love-making. I was later to find out her reason, but my own was only too apparent. Frank was puzzled, but he had made his own ring of friendship, and he said nothing beyond a few hints as to the necessity of care on my part in view of Aunt Mary's unveiled and relentless animosity. Henry, in his fatuous, though innocent, way, made matters almost

unbearable by asking all kinds of persistent questions when we met for meals. I think Aunt Mary used him unknown to himself. Uncle Jacob, out of business, summoned me to interviews that he tried to give a paternal air to, and that proved so fruitless of information and so fruitful of rage on his part and pale cheeks and flaming eyes on mine that they fell out of practice ; and in business, where he had his lawful occasions (or unlawful occasions, which are the same thing in that atmosphere), he terrorised and bullied me in pure fury—so much so, indeed, as to injure his business considerably, for, in order to have his quarrel, he faulted some work from me that should have been valuable to him. But I held my secret firmly, and with no more falsehoods than were necessary to that just end.

So Aunt Mary tried other methods of discovery. One morning I came to breakfast to find a letter waiting in an unfamiliar handwriting. The envelope had been opened. It was only some or other bill, but its being open puzzled me. It had been torn open quite undisguisedly. I looked up towards Aunt Mary, and she, meeting my eye, said coolly :

“ I mistook it for one of mine, and opened it.”

As I thought on it the incident struck me as altogether significant. It was obvious why she had opened it, but it worked out curiously. The fact that the handwriting had been strange to me made me realise that she had opened it because it was strange to her ; which meant, in its turn, that she knew the handwritings that were not strange, and whence they came ; which further meant that my letters were being watched. The realisation of this distressed me considerably.

Later, however, I made use of it for my own ends. I got Tim to write me letters in disguised scripts. Only once were these invaded, I will admit, but those that reached me securely I left lying about my room, and I have no doubt but that they were duly scanned. They explained my movements, by inference, in a manner highly satisfactory to myself.

Meanwhile my manuscripts made as regular journeys back to me as they were sent out by me. I felt so sickened and disheartened that it required all my doggedness to send them again on their journeys. They meant so much to me that it

seemed an insolence to them to send them out to face, not criticism, but scorn. It was like displaying one's wife naked.

Then I took a number of them down to Mr. Ramsay.

"Ah!" said he. "I wondered. I divined this; and that, believe me, is already their justification. Men that look prophets usually are prophets. And a man does not write all this for fun." He bore them over to his desk and placed them there. "I shall read them carefully, Jack, my friend, and whatever I can do in any way, I will."

"They've all been despised at least twice apiece."

"Poof! That's no judgment. Editors usually take what they can't avoid, and the unavoidable is usually, or, at least, often, created for them by the aroma of well-known names, private friendships, lunches and dinners. Literature, that great noble calling, has become such a trade that it almost stinks. In fact it does stink. Men write for hire, as they cheat for hire, lie for hire, sell men's hard labour and women's dear honour for hire. By Christ! it's horrible; horrible. I would like Him back for one week with His whip of cords and His honest word 'thieves.' But they'd have Him up for criminal libel and assault, and probably deport Him. You know G——s work?"

"Yes. That's to say, I know his name."

"Well, you may or may not have noticed that he has a novel advertised for this spring. Cheap, strong and nasty, his stuff is, as you doubtless know. Now I know the two who are writing this. A girl-typist and a man-'devil.' Each of them is doing different portions; but he is in command. Now for this they between them will get a little over thirty pounds. G—— will alter a little here and there, add a little here and there, choose a title and put his name to it, and get not less than one thousand five hundred pounds down on account of twenty-five or thirty per cent. royalties. That is Art, my Jack; that is the noble calling of literature."

"But," I stammered, "they can't; they don't know his style."

"It is no style. Their previous duty is to study his tricks of expression."

"But it's terrible."

"Precisely!" He sat looking on me and anger had

transformed his face. I had never seen him so. Anger makes all men more or less like one another ; but his had a clean, hard, direct character to it that bore the imprint of his personality sharply and freshly. I guessed that he knew, and had lately seen, the " devil " in question. " But let us leave this," he suddenly said, with a gesture of impatience. " And, friend Jack Elthorne, are you content to enter these soiled waters with the clean work of your brain—for I make no doubt, you see, that it is clean ? "

What had I to say to this ? He spoke as though I had chosen, whereas the truth to me seemed as though I were obeying laws and impulsions that were as inevitable as undeniable. I said so.

" That's as it should be," he said. " And, it being so, you must cling to it though you starve for it : it's your honour. No wincing. I'll help you all I can : that's my honour. See ? "

" Yes," said I. He tuned me always as one might an instrument.

" Good ! That's a pact—not of our making, but of our accepting. Quit you like men ; be strong : eh ? Great God, there's some good stuff in that book, what do you say ? But you're not thinking of leaving Muelers, until at least you have something to step to ? "

" How can I ? But yet it sometimes seems to me——"

" In what way do you mean ? "

" Well, in me and in Uncle Jacob. You see, he oppresses me sometimes so that I think I must simply run from him. At Hampstead my life is a hell ; I am like a hunted rabbit. Then he keeps hinting at my uselessness, and holding dismissal always over my head. It isn't so much that I fear dismissal ; I don't know what the deuce I should do, but it would be a bit of a relief, anyway ; but the way he puts it makes it hang about in the air like an unknown terror. He uses it to bully me with, I know, and I've had some rotten times of late."

" He wouldn't dismiss you. He couldn't."

" Oh, I know that all the time. But there it is."

" Didn't your father leave you any money ? "

" What little there was, was spent on Frank's schooling and my keep."

"Ah! It would be well to tackle him on the subject one of these days. It would only do harm now, I fear."

XII

A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY

In fact, Uncle Jacob these days was beginning to have an effect on me that could be only described by one word, and that was the word I had used in my conversation with Mr. Ramsay. He oppressed me. All the old fear I had of him began to return, and encamp about me like a nameless foe pitching his shadowy tents in the darkness. I thought I had thrown it off, but I was in the adversary's country, and at the least relinquishing on my side he was round and about me again. I still struggled, still declared I would not cease in the effort to hold my own soul, and throw off this hateful domination, yet all the while I was possessed of a hopelessness born of the feeling that beneath this ordinary struggle there was something uncanny in it all.

For example, whenever I left his presence I felt depleted of energy: often, indeed, I had a heavy headache, of a curious nature and persistence, unlike those I incurred periodically. After such headaches I would often have some kind of an illusive picture floating through my brain, that I vainly sought to realise and set out in orderly array. I used sometimes to concentrate my whole imaginative effort in the attempt to catch it, but that drove it away irrecoverably beyond the margin of conception.

Then one day the wished illumination came.

In the morning I had had a violent passage with Uncle Jacob, which he had begun by finding some inevitable fault

with my efforts to realise his desires in some or other chintz.

"Why do you never do anything right, boy?" he asked, looking over his spectacles at me with an evil gleam in his eye.

"I do, and I did that right, and as well as any man could have done," I answered, in manifest irritation.

He scowled silently at me. It was not his way to reply to a straightforward speech. He turned to some other piece of work, leaving the first utterly alone, and made some other equally bitter criticism, if criticism it may be called, with regard to that. Again I held him firmly, and again he scowled at me and passed the matter silently.

He continued in silence for awhile, passing one fabric after another through his fingers, as it were contemplatively. Then suddenly, with no warning, while I waited there holding him off firmly, he exploded. A piece of blue and white fabric, in imitation of old china, was flung at me, and fell, and hung, on the lapel of my coat.

"Look at that!" he cried excitedly.

I did not look at it: I looked at him, for the veins stood out on his forehead. He had suddenly recovered the mastery, springing, as it were, from the vantage ground of his authority. I had firmly held him off, and the fear of him; but now like a tide it rushed in on me through the broken dykes.

All my vices were arraigned before him: my inadequacy, my neglect, my carelessness, my presumption, my assinity, my bumptiousness, my swelled head and obnoxious conceit—indeed, he was fairly aflow on the waters of my bad nature and evil ways.

"I am sorry I ever burdened my hands and my days with you, you whelp of folly." He was wont, on such occasions, to coin some wonderful epithets for the expression of his contempt. "You will come to an evil end, I prophesy for you, you obnoxious—" he paused in the choice of his word—"youth"—he gave it the emphasis of full contempt—"with your night-wanderings and your secret ways and your furtive disposition. Go out of this room at once, and do as I bid you; do you hear me?"

All this while he had stood over me and walked about me, advanced toward me and passed me, and my skin was dry

and cold, and I was weary, feeling as though I had been whipped, and ready to weep in utter prostration, as I passed out of the room.

I went out with the picture of his purple fury, and the first thing I saw outside was Mr. Tonson and some other man with pale, white faces, lustreless eyes, and shrinking, deprecatory manner. It startled me, so marked was the contrast. I stumbled up the stairs, angry, helpless, and broke in on Tim with an oath.

"Damn and blast him, that true devil of hell!"

"Ah, ha! Eh? What's say? He's in good form to-day, what?" His rat-like eye quizzed me shrewdly and quickly. Adequate objurgations defied my tongue.

"You look a bit pasty about the gills, I may say." At once, and with cruel meaning, the picture of Tonson's face flashed before my eye. Tim must have picked it out of my thought, for he said: "We'll have you like the jackdaw in a shake or two. Oh, my God! What a jolly time we do have in this place! We do see life, any old way. But you used to hold him off once. He didn't use once to make you look fishy in the eyeball, as I will say. But why don't you biff his snitch? Wouldn't 'e look up, eh, what? It's the only way, son, with that sort of card. Hit him sudden, and hit him hard, and run like a man!"

I sank into my chair and hardly heard him. Yet I must have heard him far more intently than I thought, for afterwards his words came back to me, sentence by sentence with pointed and deliberate insistence.

For that evening I sat in my room. Rhoda was away again, on similar business to that which had taken her away before, and I had collected myself to read. Yet my thoughts were not on the book I had before me. They were seeking to capture, and lay prisoner at my feet, a thought of which I was only too painfully aware. Tim's words of the morning, together with certain images I had only half seen, seemed to crowd up into the heavens of my mind and drop a weary dew on my brain.

Then as I sat there, rather weariedly relinquishing the effort to grapple with my thoughts, in the submission of myself to an orderless and melancholy brooding, my thoughts began to array themselves into pictures. I saw my Uncle Jacob, with his

rich complexion and black, lustrous eyes, sitting in his dark room, hung with drawings and designs, and decorated in a somewhat massive style, through the windows of which the quick gleam of the Thames could be seen for one moment between an avenue of grimy, evil, melancholy warehouses. There he seemed to sit in restless, nervous energy of evil while a stream of men passed fearfully into his presence, and passed out again with agitated looks, trembling hands and pale faces washed of all colour. The picture had become exaggerated, one might say morbidly exaggerated, from the complexion of ordinary appearances, and yet it seemed to me to have been exalted by that fact into its truer significance. There he sat in the murkiness, out of which his rich flesh and bright eyes burned, while men streamed in, and emerged bled of their vitality !

Then I started up with a low cry and clutched for my support the brass knob of the bedpost that gleamed and shone in the light that illumined the room. As clear as a plain beneath me, from which the mists have rolled away; the whole thing lay.

"Good God !" I murmured. "The man's a vampire."

The thought burst about me with a horror that no imagination can conceive. The very house in which I stood and lived seemed to me like a monstrous charnel-house. I feared it, and feared it with something like trembling in my limbs ; and yet a violent indignation possessed me, an anger so fierce that I could have gone to Uncle Jacob's study and crushed the life out of his throat on behalf of the men whom he had wronged with a wrong for all eternity. It might have been well had I done so. I remember I cried with the feeling of my helplessness. Then the thing stank in my nostrils with an obnoxiousness so violent that I fled out of the horror.

It was late before I returned, and my mind was calmer. I lit my pipe and lay in bed determined to think this thing out. The whole conception was so utterly foreign to any of my thoughts on the relations of human beings one to another that my reason revolted at it. I was not so foolish as to think that a man can only have contact with another physically, nor was I so inexperienced as to think that that strange, non-physical contact was without its effects on the physical system ; but the near connection of the two, with the malign

possibilities it suggested, defied my reason. Yet I could not deny the thing I had seen. It was what I had been hanging on the margin of for months, and for good or for ill it was for ever inextricably a part of me, as a man's own vision must ever be a part of him where intellectual faiths may fade with the passing of time.

One by one I recalled the instances that had puzzled me in days of the past. I remembered Highland Tozer, with his defiant, half-careless instinct of liberty, his brown tweeds, and his fine, easy, manly way of walking, swinging his legs free from the hips, with steady trunk and head thrown back, the half-smile on his flushed face—now in the black uniform of the City, with pale, anxious face, hesitating manner and shrinking way of walking. I thought of Tonson, and though I did not know his tragedy I imagined him as he might have been, and held before my eye the pale, shrinking, washed-out man he was, with an ungainly long walrus-moustache hanging over his lips for ever mumbling. I recalled others who, in my own time, had come into the web at the centre of which Jacob Mueller sat: I saw them come, one with rosy face, another, a rather delicate lad with a bright eye and a flush that ran quickly to his cheek, another, my senior, a clean-limbed, athletic fellow of frank, engaging manner; all of whom now were pale and thin and not a little wearied. And I recalled the one marked contrast to them all; and I shuddered. I realised, with something like horror, that he was probably only one of many, whom our modern commercial system has put in the way of feeding their damnable and abominable instinct, though I was content to believe that his was maybe one of the extremer instances, being a dramatic, because horribly picturesque, example of it.

Then I fell asleep to dream, not of this, but of figures that were wild and strange and devilish.

XIII

THE PANGS OF JEALOUSY AND A PROPOSAL

I was now, for the first time since meeting Rhoda, taking up my work again, and taking it up, not more seriously, for that could scarcely have been, but with a more definite intention, giving it a more definite connection with her, seeing she believed in it so earnestly, and hoping now actively to win from it a livelihood sufficient to enable me to make her my wife. I had not yet spoken of marriage to her, for I felt she was not ripe for it. We were yet, in her regard, amusing ourselves with one another, and she was, at times, a little afraid of my impetuosity. But I had had encouragement from Mr. Ramsay, and that fired me to think of bigger things. He had written me a long letter, through which the good cheer of courage rang even while he criticised me severely. Let me quote a passage from it.

"Lastly, Jack, one caution. One of the supreme difficulties of all Art, but especially in the Art of words, is to carry out Keats' over-quoted principle of 'loading every rift with ore' without making the result unwieldy. He was, I think, singularly unfortunate in quoting this precept to Shelley, who loaded not less surely than he, though with a different cargo. However! But you either under-load, in a running facility, or, in some sudden fury, so much over-load as to make the result inchoate. But there! I am only telling you things you must find out for yourself, or fail in sincerity. You have, let me affirm, something to say, and, let me add, something that should be said; and that is the absolute thing. I like what others will all blame in you: your untutoredness and adventure. Believe me, if a man matures before he is forty, he has either gone astray or will have finished by forty. Write as much as you will, the more the better, but don't write in advance of yourself, and don't be one of the calves who is afraid of not having found such and such a piece of obdurate knowledge. The things you know, know absolutely, and don't let the up-to-date young man or the ossified old man brow-beat you out of; the things you don't know, wait patiently for. Life's a grand ad-

venture if we're willing to wait ; and the best of it is always before us.

" Can I say more than this : fault or no faults, gaucheries or no, I will not easily forget these things of yours, for they have somehow helped and enriched my intellectual being ; and that is the grand spiritual fact of great writing."

The page I quote from has been well-thumbed in the passage of time between. The day I received it was one on which no work or reading could be done for joy, and I saw lively hope in the promise which closed the letter, that he would introduce me to one or two editors who might be willing to look at my work more closely and help me. It was my only grief that Rhoda was not in London, in order that I might bear her the letter in the overflow of my joy.

But two days thereafter she was to return, and I bore the letter with me to King's Cross, thinking to display it before her. The first sight I saw, however, sent it spinning down the wind and out of mind.

For some quite unaccountable reason I was late, and as I reached the platform the passengers were already streaming down it. So I stood beside the great, begrimed engine, on which the driver and stoker were already at work releasing the pressure, and scanned the crowd eagerly. Then my breath caught and wildness rushed into my brain, for I saw my tall adversary stepping down towards me with his arm within Rhoda's.

She saw me, but she took no notice of me, and when she had passed, I stood there as in a trance of despair, while all the smoky atmosphere of the station surged in great clouds before my sight. Then I slowly, as though a great age had come on me, turned about and made down the long platform. It was an ordinary week-end, and I had come up in my lunch interval ; so when I reached the hideous telephone boxes, I thought to telephone to Tim asking him to cover my traces as I might not be back that afternoon. But I had not the energy to take the decision, and wandered on in futile distraction. In the street two men ran against me, swearing at me, and the noise of the traffic jarred on me, so I went back into the station for refuge.

Again I stood helplessly, not knowing quite what to do. I

had by appointment to meet her that evening. I swore I would not do so—though I knew well that I would. I swore at her, cursed her and hated her. Yet I cried out with a great cry of joy and happiness when her hand fell on my arm and her voice sounded in my ear.

“Rhoda! Oh, my dear!”

“My dear Jack, I never expected you to come up at this time of a week-day.”

“What was that beast doing with his arm in yours?”

“Jack, don’t be silly!”

“Silly? Oh, my God!”

“I think I had better get home if you’re going to spoil everything.”

“Where can we go and talk?”

“Of course we can’t! What about your work?”

“Oh, hang my work!”

I swept away her opposition, and a few minutes afterwards saw us on the top of a lumbering bus being borne in the direction of Hyde Park. I suppose my perturbed manner attracted attention towards us, for I saw several glances turned our way; but I paid no heed to them, and I think Rhoda was being borne forward too swiftly to think any more of them than I did.

“Does he always take your arm?”

“Sometimes. Why shouldn’t he?—if he wants to.”

“Does he ever kiss you?”

“Don’t ask too many questions!”

“He does.”

“Well, what of it?”

“Oh God!” I groaned in despair. The picture rose in my mind of his stooping to kiss her, and was pure agony to me.

Silence fell on us to relieve the tension as the bus lumbered through the depressing air of Marylebone. As she sat beside me I felt rebellion rising in her. For myself, I had reached the limits of pain, of pure self-torture, and I began to see that I was losing in her the advantage that the weeks had gained. In that craftiness of instinct that is yet a kind of perfect sincerity, I turned to her therefore, and said simply:

“It pains me, dear, to think of any other man touching or handling you.”

“Well, it shouldn’t, that’s all I’ve got to say.” Rebellion

was still in her voice, but it was being quelled, as I could hear.

"Don't you want me to care for you like that, Rhoda?"

"Why should you?" Her head was firmly held, with her glance straightforward.

"Look at me, Rhoda!"

Still she gazed obstinately ahead.

"Look at me, dear girl!" I closed my hand upon hers, and she did not resist.

"Dearest!" I repeated.

Slowly she turned her eyes on me. There was an odd mixture of hardness and softness in them.

"Don't you want me to care for you like that?"

"Well, perhaps I do. But you go and spoil everything when you act like that."

"My darling!"

"Do you know that people are watching us?"

"Look! If you met me walking with another girl, with my arm in hers, would you mind?"

"No, I don't think I should."

"Honest?" I held her eyes with mine.

"Well, perhaps I should."

"Well!" I left my manner to imply the rest.

"But you see it's different with him."

"How is it?" I felt the torture arising again, but I held it down.

"But it is!"

"How so?"

"Oh, well!" Impatience cried in her voice, but it was not an impatience I much objected to.

"It's really much worse with him." I waited awhile, lest she should ask why. "Far worse! Because, you see, you said he was trying to get you to marry him." I waited again.

"Whereas——"

"What?" My sustained silence brought on her query.

"One of these days it's my name I have made up my mind you're to have."

"Jack!" Wondering astonishment stood erect in her wide eyes as she faced round on me.

"Indeed it is. And I shall be very, very proud when that day can be."

There was the warmth of spring in the sun that beat on us as we sat in the ensuing silence on that bus while it rolled through Portland Street as over a murmuring sea. Then I slipped my hand down beside me, and her own crept out of her lap and pressed it with a soft, strong pressure that revealed much to me. And the bus lumbered on into the West as we sat so, hand in hand, while a glad, quiet joy lit up my whole being.

I longed then to consolidate, and at the same moment to commemorate, the occasion. Slowly an idea resolved itself in my mind.

"Have you lunched?" I asked softly.

"No," she replied, as softly, turning on me; and added, "You're a dear boy."

Thrilled with that note we dismounted and found a tea-shop. Then I left her for a moment, saying I would telephone to the office to put up an excuse for my absence, and fled swiftly to the nearest jeweller's. To him I explained that I had no more than a few shillings on me, but that if he would take my watch as deposit, I wished forthwith to choose a ring. There was a little difficulty in that, for that watch had been father's and was a handsome one. Then I hastened back to Rhoda.

She sat in the dark corner we had chosen, awaiting me.

"Do what you wanted to?"

"Yes," I said. "Let me sit that side, will you?"

"Won't this side do, silly?"

"No, it just won't."

A happy gaiety filled us both.

"Now are you satisfied?" she asked, when I had effected the change. A soft light shone in her eyes as she looked on me.

"Partly," I said, taking her hand and caressing it. Then I slowly and deliberately drew out the case from my pocket, and, holding her fast by the hand, slipped the ring on to her finger.

"Oh, Jack!" she whispered, clutching fast hold, almost a fierce hold, of my hand with hers, so that the jewels glistened under my eye. Her eyes, too, were almost hard and fierce as they looked in mine. Then she whispered, letting fall her eyes: "Am I always to wear this?"

"Please, dear!"

"There'll be trouble about it."

"He won't sack you?"

"Oh no, he's not that sort. But he won't like it. I'll leave him if you want me to, Jack!" She spoke this last suddenly and earnestly.

"No, no; I wouldn't have it at any price, dear." I longed for it unutterably, but the splendid concession of it disarmed me completely.

It was a silent and fragmentary meal we had; the touch of each other's hand was more to us than the eating of tasteless, disordered food. And afterwards, at the far end of Hyde Park, as we sat beneath the leafless trees and talked of many things, I showed her at last Mr. Ramsay's letter.

To my surprise she evinced no enthusiasm over it.

"What do you think of it?" I asked, a little disappointed.

"It doesn't take much reading of the things you showed me to say that, I should think," she replied.

"I thought it rather generous," I said.

"It may be," said she, very confidently, "but it's no more than right. You'll be a great man one of these days, greater than Mr. Ramsay, Jack, although you may get disappointments a bit at first. That's only to be expected."

It must be confessed that she did not help me in quite the intimate way of understanding that Mr. Ramsay did; indeed, her simple and perfect acceptance of my destiny rather puzzled, if indeed it did not a little disconcert, me, even while it encouraged. She did not make me feel as though a fight had to be fought, and a hard war waged; consequently her acceptance seemed somewhat removed from sympathy. But I warmed again when she declared she would herself type my work. It declared a comradeship in the fight to be fought.

Fate was kind to us that day. I was wary at dinner, expecting attack. All passed away peaceably, however. And the following morning I learned from Tim that there had not even been an enquiry for me. I took it for heaven's blessing on our eternal union; heaven's pure augur that, whatever trials might come from without, at least nought would come to mar the inwardness of our perfect love.

XIV

A SILENT AND SECRET CONFLICT

There was not a moment of my days, all this time, that was not infested with the oppression of my conflict with Uncle Jacob. Knowing what I had to contend with, for there was not the fraction of a doubt in my mind as to the reality and earnestness of the issue, I braced myself for the conflict. It was as though I drew up my belt for a race. Yet that greater fact brought a greater feeling of oppression, and consequently a more severe and continued exhaustion. Sometimes, in his presence, an intense conception of horror possessed me. At other times the fight was set in deliberate, ordered array, and there was a glory in it. But what harassed me most was that I knew I was doomed to failure. I could, I felt, have beaten him, or at least drawn out an equal fight, but that implied certain conditions that were denied.

It must be remembered the place I was in. The discipline of a commercial house is devised for the sake of effectiveness : and effectiveness, in commercial terms, means monetary success to repletion to the man or men at the crown of the organisation, with as little of that success as can happily be devised for the various agents and officers that constitute the organisation. It is essentially an immoral state of affairs : far more immoral than sensual vice, which is an excess largely dispensed with on its exercise, whereas the other vitiates the fraternity of the spirit of man. Yet so it is. And it can readily be seen that, inasmuch as the crown of the organisation is in a stupendous numerical inferiority, he exacts a servility of manner as the only method by which he may maintain an impossible state of affairs.

Consequently my only effective weapon was knocked out of my hand. The very outrage of having to call a fellow-man "sir," with the implication that he was better than I by virtue of his office, and not by the office of his virtue and the greatness of character, destroyed all chance of equality. Now and then, insidiously, I would quietly assume equality, or I would even openly defy him, but he was quick to scent defeat in that, and, on the instinct, he would destroy me.

"I'll trouble you, Jack, to remember to whom you speak,"

he would say. I remembered it only too well. I remembered the horror of my night of discovery.

All the while I felt that I was alone in my struggle, and that I must needs be so. I mentioned it to Rhoda, discreetly, and she replied in her free and splendid way :

"Then, if you feel that, why do you stay with him ? I see myself staying with a brute like that ! If you were to leave you could soon get something better elsewhere, or as good anyway, for he pays you shockingly, as I hope you recognise. Leave him, dear, and take up your writing."

And she meant it. Her courage sang in that : her fine, indomitable courage. Nevertheless, I felt that she did not quite enter into the horror of the thing for me. Hers was excellent good-fellowship, but it was not sympathy.

I resolved, then, to keep the matter to myself, and to wrestle in secrecy. But such resolutions are not often kept virgin, and after an unhappy harrying one day at the hands of Uncle Jacob, I went up to seek advice of Mr. Ramsay that night.

I could do so freely, for his was of that order of mind to recognise that I was as likely to be right in a difference as he—though he did not recognise so freely the major right of a discoverer to more than respect, to an attitude of faith indeed. I stumbled as I told him, and was sorry I could not retreat into secrecy, which are sure indications of an unreceptive atmosphere. So I was not surprised when he said to me :

"But don't you think one does wisely to accept an explanation that lies at hand rather than turn to one that is both remote and complex ? You mean, I take it, that your uncle bullies you—an unfortunate fact that we know only too well—and that he thereby depletes your energy. Good, that's simple and go-ahead thinking. But—vampire ! Of course I know well enough you are not thinking of those recondite tales of vampiring that predominate in Central Europe, and other parts of the globe. That's something more bizarre, and yet it's curiously similar, when you come to think of it. It may or may not be true, and it belongs to a different sphere of thinking. It is its own business, true or not as the case may be. But this is altogether a simpler thing. You don't mean to identify them, of course."

"But where does he get his lips and colour from, and his energy ?" I blurted out, and saw immediately that I had

struck on the very centre of the matter. But before I could develop it, he interposed :

“ Don’t you think that’s to enquire rather too closely ? ”

“ We want to enquire closely. I do. And haven’t you yourself said that so-called scientific answers to problems are merely the same problems phrased otherwise ? You say—I have said to myself—that he dominates me, and so oppresses me, and so depletes me of energy. But what does one mean by that ? ” I paused on my question, but he did not reply, steadily looking on me. “ You can’t struggle without contact, surely : not physically, anyway ; and how can you spiritually ? Have you noticed how a number of people almost seem to throw him off, with quick, rapid, nervous interjections almost like physical gestures ? I remember father used to do so. How do you account for that except on the ground of some kind of contact ? I mean of course a contact of spirit with spirit, or soul with soul, that portion of ourselves that is not confined within this trunk and these limbs.”

“ Now I retort on you, what about his lips and colour ? ”

“ Oh,” I said, with a lothness to discuss matters that so defied speech, “ I don’t know. How can I ? Only if there is a contact, and one kind of rhythm subdues another, it is not difficult to see how vitality may pass out from one person to another. Look at his stupendous, inexhaustible energy and the curious way in which he seems to feed it by clinging to the office. It’s his sustenance, he cannot abide away from the places where human souls fill the air ; he never by any chance takes a holiday—at any rate, by himself.”

“ My dear Jack, you’re positively horrible ! ” Mr. Ramsay cried out.

I hardly heard him, for I was myself obsessed with the horror of it. It floated before my eyes like a vision, and I passed into that strange mood that is more than all thinking ; that is like the centre of knowledge, defying thought ; on the borders of which thoughts lie like spoiled and abused fragments of knowledge. It occurred to me afterwards what some of these marred borders were. It was as though I had seen the true enormous iniquity of vast cities, where the congestion is such that soul learns to thrive unnaturally and unhealthily on soul, instead of on the clean, direct effluence of earth and

her spirits, and those notable hierarchies that sweep past on their timeless destinies.

For years on years thereafter I fed on that moment of vision. It opened up newer vistas of thought indefinitely, and to this hour I develop it.

Inasmuch as I felt he did not follow me the matter had gone too far for comfortable breathing. So I said: "Perhaps it's only fantastical after all; I don't know," although I knew well that it was not so. It is only thus one may preserve one's spiritual privacy. And so we talked of other things.

It was my last attempt to seek understanding. I bore my battle silently and in secret. At all turns I found uncanny corroboration of its actuality, and the result was to make me feel the impossibility that such a state of affairs should continue. For example, I noticed now fully, what I had dimly perceived before, how quick Uncle Jacob was to anticipate my thoughts, as though he knew the development of my mind as well as I did whose concern was with it. So I determined on an experiment: which answered splendidly. Those just retorts I could not make under the charge of insolence I began to think actively, while I myself remained silent.

At first I was bewildered at the result. Whether it was that I was stronger at first, or he more reluctant latterly, I cannot say, but at first he scarce ever failed to respond, though the method failed in power as time proceeded. Once he rebuked me sharply for insolence, whereupon I mildly retorted that I had said nothing, and he looked away with a surly clench of his teeth. Once or twice he flushed angrily, and I held my mind firm, knowing that so long as I was strong he would not attempt to overpower me. But generally his procedure was to raise my thought with a prefatory "You might say——" and proceed to defend himself against the charge as though it were laid upon him.

I do not doubt that under level conditions I could have held my own. I chafed at the notion of defeat from him; but what could I do? The ridiculous conditions of what is known as modern civilisation gave him an artificial ascendancy over me, which he was not slow to use. At all times it continued. Not only in the City, but at home he maintained it. In a deep sense I was not my own, and I could not I

felt, achieve my ambitions while this was so, for Art is the flower of personality and the aroma of the closely guarded soul.

I even began to desist from work, feeling this was so. Unrest ate its way into all my days and ambitions. Such a state of affairs obviously could not continue, and so I began to cast about for an escape.

XV

I RECEIVE AN OFFER, AND ACCEPT IT

There are intense and adventurous moments in a man's life when the attainment of one desire shines before the eye as its only goal and absorbs all the energies. But there do not often come moments when several goals become inextricably bound up as the result of one effort. At such moments, bitter and stressful though they be, Life reaches out to its utmost of effort, and wears the flush of ardour on its cheek.

I was bitter enough at continued failure, but such an hour had come to me. The chief thing that stood out as giving centre to all the rest was marriage with Rhoda. I saw her almost daily ; she shared all my hopes and ambitions, reading, and often typing, my manuscripts ; and the passion to have her as my wife wasted and wore me day by day. Uncle Jacob, I knew, would have nothing to do with any thought of my marrying. That could have been foreseen : he would profess entire interest on my behalf, talk of my youth and his greater wisdom in life, and forbid it absolutely—lest it should entail a possible monetary responsibility on him at a future date. Moreover, he would find specific objection to Rhoda—because she had not previously been known to him—even as he would have found fault with any girl known to him because

he knew too much of her. He was not singular in that; he was only typical of a certain kind of parent, or some such other person in the position of guardian.

Consequently marriage would have to be won outside Messrs. Mueler, Ltd. And what other way so likely as the pen that was to serve my ambition? Thus my three chief desires were intertwined. And this joint appeal was so powerful, and so absorbed all my attention, that the dislike I was wont to meet from certain people increased the more by my neglect of their mere existence. Even Frank and the innocuous Henry grew to saying bitter things: the former, now in no code of stoic indifference, but quite shrewdly, and the latter in his foolish, lazy way. Which did not in any degree lessen my desire to be out of it all.

Weary months saw no diminution of my steadfastness, and Rhoda sometimes would undertake the despatch and receipt of manuscripts, so as to save me the sickening blow of their return. Once I had one taken, and in the joy of seeing my name in print it did not grieve me that I received no payment for its use. Others, too, the same paper took, at no higher rate of payment than the joy of print. Afterwards I learnt that these had been seen and noticed by some whose opinion I came to value, but they seemed to win no attention now, and I doubt whether they would have won any notice in the end save for my own subsequent efforts.

Then one day I received a letter from Mr. Ramsay asking me to go up to meet a friend of his who might help me. I went, and found the friend to be a man who proposed starting a cheap weekly literary paper. To oblige Mr. Ramsay, as it seemed, he offered me the sub-editorship—which filled me full of delight, a delight that was dulled a little when I learnt that the salary was to be but a pound a week, less by ten shillings than I now earned. It was pointed out to me, however, with some energy by the editor-to-be, and with quiet point by Mr. Ramsay, that my position should enable me to purchase some kind of a hold in that editorial world where literary work is a matter of arrangement and not the discriminating selection of the best work offered.

When I mentioned it to Rhoda she was reserved and silent, and I could see that the meagreness of the salary was in her mind. Therefore I took to arguing in its favour, using the

same arguments as Mr. Ramsay had employed for my persuasion, so proving to myself that, with all its drawbacks, the idea was one of those predestined to existence. Nevertheless she supported me loyally.

"You will get on, dear," she said, with that firm and almost unenthusiastic faith in my powers and future that always seemed to possess her. "I should take it, I think. You must make a start in it, and this is your field."

"It isn't much," I said deprecatingly, hoping she would demolish the objection for me.

"No, it isn't," said she quietly, disappointing me. "You do as you think best," she added. Then, seeing my depression, and perhaps perceiving no less my inclination, she said: "Take it, Jack. If it doesn't achieve anything else, it will bring you out of the clutches of that old villain, your uncle."

She was as depressed as I at the prospect. But she seemed as persuaded of its inevitability.

So I took my lot firmly in my two hands, and wrote accepting the offer, asking when I should be called upon to begin. I wrote also to Mr. Ramsay, telling him what I had done.

It was in the early days of summer, when an advance of great heat had come like a trembling hush on to the woods standing in their young and lucent green. Therefore it was not by reason of the cold that I trembled at the prospect of declaring my intention to Uncle Jacob. I put off the decision from day to day in pure craven-heartedness. I stepped up to his room, to the closed door of it, and after feebly knocking and receiving no reply, turned back with a vast relief. Once, as we sat smoking together alone after dinner, I addressed him to that end, and, on his asking me what it was I wished, proceeded to speak of some business that had transpired in the day.

I have not precisely won a name for cowardice in my life. Neither its general course, nor its details, would, I think, tend to bear out that description of me. Yet my nerves played me such tricks each time I resolved to approach him that I scarcely knew myself.

At last, being stung to a great moment by a haunting lyric that trailed across my mind as I fingered my books one evening, I dropped my book, and burst in on my astonished uncle. It was not his wont so to be interrupted. The sight of him

quelled me a little, and I think, in attempting to dare my mood to pass, my air was jaunty as I said :

"Uncle, I don't think there's much chance of progress for me at Thames Street."

The total effect of my sudden inrush, my defiant air, and my quaint piece of information was to procure me a more generally flabbergasted uncle than I had seen for many a day.

"Besides that," I continued, "I want to get into literature."

His brow came down frowningly over an angry eye as he stared up at me, but he was too amazed to say anything.

"In fact, you see, I've already got an offer of a sub-editorship, and I'm thinking of accepting it."

This aroused him. He raised himself up, startled at this.

"Insolent boy!" he cried. His face was purple as he rose up opposite me. "What do you mean by coming in on me like this? Haven't I enough trouble during the day without your breaking in on me with your conceited ways and your bad manners? Go out of this room at once!"

I proceeded to do as he bade me, when he called me back.

"What is this I heard you say just now?" he asked.

I squared myself before him as I replied doggedly :

"I'm leaving you, sir. I have had a berth offered me on a literary paper just about to be established, and I have accepted it because it seems to me more the kind of thing that will give my life a certain purpose and occasion. I am sorry to distress you."

"You leave my house, then!" he cried out angrily.

"I had purposed to do so. It would be fairer to you, and freer for me."

"Preposterous fool!" he shouted. "What amazing knavery is this? You shall do no such thing, do you hear me? You shall do no such thing, you dolt, you trickster! I forbid it: I forbid it absolutely. Shall I be defied by a conceited whippersnapper like you! You shall continue here just as before, and, if you like, I shall in due time take into consideration the possibility of advancing your wages, though you get now far more than ever you deserve." Then his rage seemed to pass to plaintiveness. "Is it for nothing I have cared for you, and tended you all these years without any reimbursement—you and your brother Frank? Why do you throw it all back on me in this thankless way? Have you no

vestige of gratitude or obligation in you, boy? But you shall not go, you shall continue just as before; do you hear me? Fool!"

"I fear I have accepted it, sir, and it is irrevocable."

"Oh, you fool! You fool! Don't stand there and defy me. Do as I bid you. Go out of this room, sir!"

I went quickly, and though he called me back I held firmly on my way.

XVI

UNEXPECTED FUNDS

It was astonishing how the whole house seemed thrilled by my piece of news. On my return to my room it had occurred to me to fly out in order to escape the inevitable. But this seemed cowardly, and I took a book, opened it, and waited instead of reading.

Surely enough the influx began. First it was Aunt Mary. She swept in with her thin, upright, stern figure and cold, steady eye. I stood to receive her, watchful and dogged.

"Your uncle has asked me to come and see you about this mad proposal of yours. Why can't you be a bit more frank with us, Jacob? Here you hide this thing, and nurse it, and secrete yourself, finally to astonish us in this altogether unjust way. Is it fair on us, do you think?"

Already, I thought, my independent resolution had effected something, if only an unaccustomed equality of address from her. But I said nothing. I was wary, and recognised that tactics were in the air. She at least would not play to sentiment, and so I was the more watchful.

"Is it true that you have already decided?"

"I have."

"Well, it must not go further without your discussing it thoroughly with your uncle." As she said this she seemed to recognise the futility of such an appeal to me: there was no conviction in her voice, and she continued more firmly:

"I cannot understand it at all, for I was under the impression that you were proceeding so splendidly at the office. Your uncle often spoke of your good work to me. He is not, as you know, the sort of man who praises his subordinates. I wish he did: it would make everybody happier, and encourage people. But that's his disposition, and we can't unmake people. I know he appreciated your work, and it was his intention that you should finally have a part in the business—after Henry." (Seeing I had to do half Henry's work for him, and control him generally at Uncle Jacob's desire, so inept was he, this did not startle me; it even let family cogitations out before my eye.) "And you are not thinking really of leaving?" she continued after a pause.

What could I say? I had nothing to say, and remained firmly silent. I could see she was nettled and angered at my silence, but she gave no sign of perturbation, and this the more made me watchful of her.

"You must think it over very carefully, Jacob, and do nothing rashly. Did your uncle say anything to you about leaving here?"

"Yes."

"That was said in anger, I am afraid. Of course he did not mean it, and, for my part, I will not permit it; so you may rest assured of that."

She was, be sure, no mean tactician, but, as she spoke, I scented danger, and divined her thought.

"I would rather go, Aunt Mary," I said.

"You mustn't take everything your uncle says in earnest."

"From myself I want to go." It was her turn for silence, and her eye was coldly fixed on me. "It would leave me freer. And I want to be free."

There was tense silence for a long time. Then: "You are very foolish; but you'll think better of it in a week," she said, and passed quickly out of the room.

Then came Henry.

"I say, Jack," he cried out, bursting in, "this is all rot-oh! You can't mean it. What the devil made you think of it?"

The pater been bullying you? He's a fair rotter that way, but it washes off, and don't hurt so much. Look here, my dear chap, you just simply can't. And we were getting on so chummily."

"It isn't a row at all, my dear chap. It's just a change of direction. Or rather, it's an undercurrent of direction coming up to the surface." This seemed to puzzle him, so I added: "I wanted to be this all along."

"But literature, Jack! That's not a paying game at all. It's the very deuce of a losing game. Out of ten who take it up, eight fail and come to grief. It's a fair pit from all accounts."

"Who told you that?"

He flushed as he said: "Everybody knows that much. But you just simply can't, anyhow. And to go out and starve, and take devil's fare—Jack, old man, think of it!" He was genuinely affected at his picture, or the picture that had been given him to present me, and we grew quite friendly. He vowed that nothing would make any difference to us, and that he would always help me to the end, whatever happened.

Then Frank came. He came almost before Henry had gone, and, walking over to my shelf, began inspecting the bindings of my books.

"Hullo!" said he.

"Before we talk," I said, "would you mind telling me if there is anybody else in the queue?"

"You're not in the least degree funny," he said.

"No?" I said. "I'm sorry. I had meant to be. But I hope you at least are going to be original, and not say what everybody else has been saying for the past hour."

"It's no good talking to you, I can see," he said brusquely. Pushing a book back into its place on the shelf, he strode out of the room.

It struck me as being very odd to think of Uncle Jacob running about below, procuring emissaries to launch up at me. It pained me too; for it reminded me that Frank and he had become wondrous friendly of late, and that Frank was becoming accustomed to do obeisance for this friendliness. Moreover it angered me, and I sat down and wrote a formal letter of resignation from Messrs. Mueller, Ltd. to Uncle Jacob. I knew this would give him to think.

Furthermore, I had another plan wherewith to astonish him. Certain words spoken by Mr. Ramsay had lived in my memory. My bondage in my state of dependence had hitherto rendered them valueless to me, but I had thought much over them, and now I had determined to work upon them.

I knew my letter would cause an early summons in the morning, and when it came, my resolve was that I should step out of that room of fear with a clearer understanding than ever I had come out of it before. Jacob Mueller was a man who could be benign enough on occasion, but for those in his employ he passed between vindictiveness and lament. It was the lament was reserved for me now, I knew.

"What does this mean, Jack? There was surely no necessity for this. You seem to treat me as though I were nothing to you at all—no more than an enemy. You have an extraordinary disposition, my boy."

"I wished to make the matter formal and in order," I said.

"Formal?" he cried out in a wail of indignant anger. "Formal? That's just like you: always wayward and unnaturally-minded. You must be formal, must you? Formal, of all things! I shall be quite glad to be rid of you."

I wonder if anyone ever found himself in accord with the man! He always, on instinct, seemed to traverse his interlocutor, thinking, I suppose, in that way to nonplus an equal tussle. I could have shaken him.

"Very well, sir!" I said, irritation pressing against the bars of restraint.

There was a long, tense silence. It was oppressive, almost like a desert silence. He evidently seemed to think he had chosen a wrong path to tread.

"You seem to have made up your mind," he said more gently.

"I have, sir," I said.

"You know you are acting very foolishly?" he asked.

"I probably am. But I want to prove that for myself."

"That is just your egotistical way of talking that annoys me," he flashed out on a momentary return of anger. But he proceeded: "What salary are you offered in this—other affair?"

"I have accepted barely enough to live on. It will, I know, be very difficult to manage on."

He looked amazed at this. "And yet you are talking of taking it?" he asked in wonder. "But you need not look to me for support."

Now was my moment! "I don't do that," I said firmly. "I shall have to pull through, like other fellows. But there was one matter I wanted to mention—that I have wanted to mention for some time, but have always put it off. I would like, if you will allow me, to see my father's will; I would like to know exactly—that is to say, how he spoke about me there." Strange, how nervous I was!

"You wretch of a boy!" He absolutely sprang at me as he spoke. "What insinuation do you want to make at me?"

"No insinuation at all," I interposed quickly.

"Leave my room, sir! I will not have you in it. Go out of it! No, don't speak to me! Go out! Go out!"

His fury was indescribable. It followed me, as I decamped up the stairs, like a wailing storm. The ignominy of having him shout at me thus was so intense, that I left the building immediately and did not return to it that day. Nor did I return to Hampstead till after dinner, when I went straight to his room. It is probable that my instinct was to make the broil so complete that there could be no question of asking me to revoke my resolution to leave.

"I have a right to see my father's will, sir," I said.

"I forbid you to mention the subject, boy," he said.

"Then I shall turn it up at Somerset House, and seek advice. I ought to know. It was *my* father he was."

"I refuse to be addressed in that way. Isn't it enough to you that I have tended you all these years, and spent money on you, and stinted nothing for you, without your coming now to me with these insinuations of your brain?"

"I am insinuating nothing, Uncle Jacob. I just ask to see the will."

"Cease talking to me, and leave me alone to myself."

I tried to make myself heard as he cried at me, and there must have been somewhat of a noise in result. But a voice rang across it like a whip.

"You leave this room, Jacob, instantly."

I turned about and saw Aunt Mary standing in the open door, her face rigid with anger. She quailed the two of us.

The following day I went up to Somerset House, and when at last I managed to extort my information from that labyrinth, I was astonished to learn that my father had left a quite decent sum of money in equal shares between Frank and myself.

Fortified with this information, I awaited my next interview with Uncle Jacob. No one spoke a word to me at Hampstead, and I exchanged words with no one, so tense was the atmosphere. I was not even summoned to my morning interviews. So I had to wait till some of the tension was released, which, inasmuch as the heat of action had passed, I was not loth to do.

Nearly ten days subsequently, one evening Henry came to me nervously with the information that his father wished me to go to him. I went, to find the old man unwontedly stiff with dignity, and Aunt Mary with him. It promised an ordeal, apparently.

"You wished to see this will," he said, and handed it to me. "You will see that your father's estate, when realised, left rather over five hundred pounds between your brother and yourself. Well, I have drawn out a few figures here, to show you, at their lowest computation—at their very lowest—what we have expended on your behalf, one way or another. I have not included your salaries, of course, although they have been influenced by the fact that I have always endeavoured that you should have the benefit of working in a firm that I myself created for other than purely commercial reasons. I have only put in your cost of keep and such matters, though, in the face of your recent behaviour, I could justly have included those pleasures and outings to which you and Frank have always come in the same way as my own children. If you regard these figures you will see how the matter stands."

I took it and examined it. There were the figures, as he said, placed down in debit and credit. I have the paper yet. It was a curious product. The sum of it showed that I owed my uncle something over one hundred and fifty pounds. I scarcely knew whether to laugh or to be maddened.

"But you haven't put down the pound a week I pay Aunt Mary," I said, half afraid to treat the thing soberly.

"And how long have you paid that?" It was Aunt Mary who asked.

"Since I was twenty-one, anyway."

"And what about the years before that?"

Certainly she seemed to head me off either way. Then I realised that this duly had been entered, and I said:

"But all that's down here."

"Do you think that that covers your keep for those years?" Her voice was cold and unperturbed.

"It was put down here with that intention," I said.

"Well, put down your pound a week, put it down, put it down! This comes of looking after relatives' children." It was Uncle Jacob who spoke now, and his crust of dignity was broken by his rising temper.

"Jacob!" Aunt Mary's cold, sharp tone stopped him short.

But I was putting down the sum as I had been bidden; to my infinite joy it turned my impossible debit balance into a credit balance. I remember, amid all the strain and awkwardness, what an infinite comedy it seemed to me.

"That leaves me a credit balance of forty-seven pounds nine shillings and threepence," I proclaimed.

"I am very sure your dear father and mother never meant that any portion of their money should be used in defiance of us. That I am sure of. It would have pained and grieved them."

Uncle Jacob's tone was sad and depressed as he spoke. All the anger and buoyancy had gone out of it, for it was plain to him that on the commitment of his own figures he had lost the day. It was Aunt Mary who realised the situation. She rose firmly, with a dignity that never deserted her. And her voice was clear-cut in the incision of its tone as she closed the business:

"You had better leave this room. That money shall be paid to you on the day you leave this house."

XVII

FAREWELLS

It was not to be expected that all these tempests had to be traversed without Tim divining the state of affairs. Yet he said nothing, maintaining the steady taciturnity that had become habitual with him. It was partly, I think, his method of keeping his castle of personality inviolate, partly his melancholy absorption in my affairs.

But one day I told him what my resolve was.

"That's no news, as I may say," he responded. "If I hadn't got a job on my hands, I'd quit too." I understood his job to be the care of his mother. "I'd clear out straight and, snip! I'd be a sailor. This isn't a job for a man, everyone cursing at you, and you cursing at everyone, and one man sweating the lot of you, and the lot of you wishing he'd slip on a banana peel on the stairs. Not much! But I've been shoved in one end, and I got to go on, I may say, till the damn machine coughs me out the other."

Deep, unalterable disgust was in his voice.

"Can't you look out for another job?" I asked. "I'd help you," I added, generously.

"Fat lot o' good another job'd do me! Oh yes, I may say. And the old spider down there'd help me, wouldn't he? He'd give me a reference, wouldn't he? He's that sort, he is, rather! What he has he holds. It's easier than breaking in fresh colts. Besides, who wants to whisk out of one giddy machine into another giddy machine? That's no cop—no good, I should say. If my dad hadn't jibbed, I'd have been a sailor. Good luck to you, any old way!"

"Of course I don't know to what I am going. But I shall be right glad to be out of this place."

"What ho! You wouldn't see me for dust the day I could clear out of here, I may say!"

When I told Mr. Tonson, he answered me with an interrogative "Oh?" and looked suspiciously at me. I had delayed telling him till the very day of my departure, and my information was intended as a prelude to touching farewells, so there was really no occasion for his suspicion. I had no intention of injuring him by evoking opinions so as to use them

against him, or anything of the sort. But in Messrs. Muelier, Ltd., everybody was in the habit of regarding everybody else with suspicion, and Mr. Tonson, as one of its oldest inhabitants, was one of the most deeply imbued with the principle.

"In fact," I continued, "this is to be my last day, and I want to say good-bye."

"Is that so?" he said, more suspiciously than ever.

"Yes," I said, "good-bye!" And I held out my hand in confirmation of my words.

"Oh, yes; good-bye!" he said, taking my hand in a cold, feeble grasp, and letting it fall again as soon as seized, lest anyone should see him engaged in this strange demonstrativeness. He walked away at once with a non-committal manner, in the way of one prepared to revoke or stand by his hand-grasp according as circumstances indicated.

This discouraged me somewhat. A freak seized me, and induced me to seek out Tozer, whom I rarely saw nowadays. I remembered he was my first friend in the place.

"Dear, dear me!" he exclaimed. "Not going really? Going to leave the firm? But whatever for?"

His astonishment, and the attachment it betokened, were astonishing. He was as mercilessly bullied as any, and was paid miserably, with no possibility of a decent wage. Moreover (a deeper indignity!) no one could have seen in him now the free, careless aristocrat of the hills he once had been. His pale face and attentive manner told their tale, and he clung to his slave's livery with astonishing fidelity.

A cruel spirit tempted me to say: "Yes, Fido, I actually am going to leave your master." I explained instead that I was anxious for something more congenial. For I liked Tozer. It was his lovable spirit had made him the more docile subject.

"Really!" he said. "But it isn't as if we were a place like a stockbroker's, is it? We are a very great deal different, aren't we? Don't you think so?"

This amazing reply reduced me to silence. I made haste to bid him farewell.

"Oh, good-bye, Mr. Elthorne! Of course the boss is a trying man, I know. He tries me, sometimes. But it's splendid to be all working together for Art, isn't it?"

I had taken a small room north of Hampstead, to which I had removed my books tenderly during the week. A carrier had been instructed to call for my box during the day. So I had now only to seek out Uncle Jacob, to take an orderly departure. But when I sought him, I found he had gone. For some curious reason it struck me as a typical act of his.

So I took my cheque and went out for the last time from that office. Yet, instead of being exalted, I was extraordinarily depressed. Quite contrary to my intentions of parsimony, Rhoda and myself went to the theatre that night in order to divert our thoughts from the prevailing melancholy.

ACT III

A TRAGIC COMEDY

I

AN OCTOBER EVENING

I declare that the fifteen years of my life between twenty-five and forty are of more account in the tensity and strain of living, that they amount to more in the weight and value of years, than all the remaining portion of my life. They commonly are so in the lot of man, I am aware, but in my case it was peculiarly so. And yet it is difficult to set them in array.

The reason partly is that this strain consisted chiefly in the total value of little things, that in after years came to seem little things, but which at the moment were of terrific concern. Who is it that has not read the biographies of men and been exasperated by being robbed of seemingly insignificant details belonging to this overweighted portion of man's life?

For example, here was I for the first time a free man, dependent on my own resources, with none to hinder me from the pursuit of my ambitions, and in the way of meeting friends who, judiciously used, should have been useful to that end. What, then, should have occupied my mind? A glory in my freedom, anxiety for my freedom, an absorbing zest in my work? None of these things. Only a melancholy that seemed almost sufficient sometimes to destroy my sanity that Rhoda and myself were not for ever man and wife.

For a week prior to my leaving the house at Hampstead I

had been afflicted with forebodings that were not so much apparent in themselves as in the positively ghastly dreams that tortured my nights, and made my wakings from them a heavy and tired relief. For years thereafter they continued ; in fact they have never truly ceased, but I am now not so raw to their torture.

Naturally my melancholy was in a way identical with these forebodings that ruled my mind whenever it was not actively employed with other things, but it touched the outer world of circumstance at one place, and so came to live actively and intensely there. I threw myself into my work with all its agreeable novelty, and undoubtedly succeeded in holding the waters off in this way, but they would sweep over me with a wilder surge in the end as a result of their withholding. No mere chronicle of the facts of my love can explain how anxiously this dominant emotion of those days bent and gave a direction to my whole subsequent life.

It was little likely that this subject, overwhelming, as it did, the rest of my life, should escape mention in my nightly meetings with Rhoda.

"It is not right," I would cry out, "it is not right that we should be separate in this way. We are one, my own darling, and that fact should be celebrated in our life. It seems to me terrible that you and I, one as we are, should only meet in this way in my few leisure hours."

"Never mind, dearest," she would comfort me. "It won't be long now, now that you are free, before you will be earning enough for us to marry on. We must be firm and patient."

"I wonder if that will ever be," I used to lament. "Oh, you cannot think, dear heart, how I hate this horrible mercenary business of bartering for a living. If one could only be assured of something definite how much better, how much harder, one could work. As it is, half my energy goes in the sickliness of despair and depression."

"Never mind, dearest," she would say and smooth back the hair tenderly from my forehead, "you are bound to win through. Never forget that. We shall laugh at all this one day." And I, in my selfishness, never realised that she felt the melancholy as acutely as I did, though she was better able to hold it away by occupation with other things.

I shall never forget the brave comfort she was to me those days.

Then the matter took a further development. As I sat in my room one evening when Rhoda had to go down to her employer for some special task, it flashed upon me, why could I not marry her and bring her to my room, for us both to live there and each proceed thence to the daily task? I jumped up and walked about the room in the sudden excitement of the idea. It possessed me powerfully all the evening, and continued the following day, despite the gray, un-idea'd lethargy of the morning.

I worked with a new inspiration till I could see her again, and in the intervals of work I set out my earnings and probable expenses under the new system I proposed. They, as I realised, had but little reference to the probable facts of the case, no more reference than such hopeful calculations and apportionings usually have; but they served their customary purpose in helping me to give tangible reality to my hopes, and in providing an activity for my thoughts on the subject. I adopted, of course, the usual method in such calculations—without any respect to the fact that it would surely be disregarded when the actual days of expenditure came. Such and such were my earnings, I put it: such and such were to be my expenditures, divisible in the following discreet economy. In addition to my salary I used to review books now for my paper, at the reduced pay of half-a-guinea for a thousand words, as I was on the staff. Using this as a combined warrant of ability and basis of operations I began slowly to get other work, and altogether, so it figured out in my calculations, I should be able to depend on not less than a hundred pounds a year, with the possibility of a fair amount more. It was precarious, but I said to myself that he was a strange sort of man who would always be on the look out for evil chances. This I said, being disposed in that direction very much myself.

It looked wonderfully simple and precise as it faced me in methodical columns on a slip of white paper. The only difficulty in the whole thing, conception and execution, that I could imagine lay in a possible visit from Frank, who did not even know that my choice in the matter of marriage had already been determined. A single difficulty might easily be dispensed with.

So I developed the matter enthusiastically to Rhoda.

"Oh, my dearest," I said to her, "it will give me a new enthusiasm in my work to have you at my side. In my own work and ambitions it will provide me with an inspiration ever at my side, my heart's own wife; and in my work at the paper I will have the same cheer, coming from your side and returning to you again. Incidentally, it will save time too, for I will be able to work of an evening, and yet have your dear company." Feeling that this contained an element of parsimony and calculation that was not seemly in love's own royal kingdom, I skirted it quickly. "I am glad I am free, for now there is no one to interfere with any of my actions."

The world was rosy to me then, and the clouds of melancholy were swept flying away. Then, with a catch at my heart, I realised suddenly that Rhoda was strangely silent.

"Why are you so quiet, dear?" I asked. "What do you think—what are you thinking of?"

I had stopped at my alarm, and she stood between me and a field beyond, her fair hair, fragile face and large feathered hat framed by the darkening glebe over which a heavy October moisture had passed a softness and richness. There were those, I thought, who would have thought her curiously beautiful so, but I never thought of beauty in that way with her, I knew only that she was necessary to me. Therefore, I was not blind to the fact that there was a cleverness in her beauty that some might have called peevish—though I would have fought them had they done so.

"Why don't you say something?" I asked, alarm and grievance in my tone.

"I don't know what to say," she said, without looking up at me.

Her perplexity rang sincere, and I drew the reins firmly in on the bridling steeds of irritation and anger that strained to fly swiftly off with my saner judgment.

"In what way, Rhoda?" I asked. "Surely it would be a happier way of life for both of us. It would be so, I know, for me, and wouldn't it be so for you?"

"I am not so sure that it would," she slowly said.

That word struck across me like the blackest treason. I was simply horrified at the thing it implied: most unreasonably, no doubt, but quite sincerely. I knew that I would not for a

single moment have suffered myself even to think such a thought.

"Rhoda!" I cried. "Oh dear, oh dear! That you should say such a thing as that."

"Oh, I don't know," she said vexedly. "I can't help it, I suppose; I only know that I think I would not be happy. Why should it be such a terrible thing to say that? Anyway, there it is: I don't like the idea at all, and I don't think it suits me."

"I know I haven't much to offer you."

"Oh, it isn't that at all, you know that quite well. It is something quite different. I hardly know myself what it is, but there's something about it I don't like."

I said nothing, for I dared not trust myself to speak. I was partly afraid of her, for I realised intensely for the first time that she would part from me with far less grief than the havoc it would produce in me; and my profound vexation at meeting a rebuff on so tender a matter choked my speech and must have expressed itself in my face.

"It's no use your looking so ugly about the matter, Jack," she said. "You jump out with these ideas and expect me to adopt them at once. It's a thing I can't do, and won't do. I am not going to be bullied into these things, and I tell you that flat." Then, as I stood there looking discontentedly on her, she added spiritedly: "If you are going to spoil the evening, Jack, the best thing I can do is to go back home."

"We had better keep walking," I said, seeing that people were noticing our wrangle.

So we paced on in tense silence. She was the first to break the silence, and she did so by declaring her intention of returning.

"It's no earthly good going on like this. I would just as soon be inside and comfortable as tramping on in this wretched silence."

"It seems inconceivable to me," I said, "that I should come to you, who profess for me a love not less than I bear you, with the proposal that we should end this wretched separate existence by marrying and living together, by making our lives one, as in fact they were, and that you should sneer at it, and say it simply doesn't suit you, in that callous, crude way."

"I haven't sneered at it."

"It comes tantamount to that."

"You don't see how impossible it is——"

"It isn't impossible, and you know that that's no sufficient excuse. It's not even a ragtag of an excuse, though you hang it out to deceive me. We could each go to our respective tasks just as at present, only we should have each other for comfort and cheer—if that means anything to you: I'm almost ashamed to confess that it still means much to me."

"And my name, if you please—have you thought of that?"

"You could call yourself by your maiden name as you do at present, though I should prefer you to take your married name."

"If I did I wouldn't keep my job for a month longer: you know what men are. I believe half the reason they employ us girls is that it pleases their sense of sex, and there's none of that satisfaction to be got out of a married woman. Oh yes, my dear Jack, you may not like it, but so it is. And I must keep my job, for I must live. Whereas, if I went on as Miss Ermott, and it came out that I was living with you there would be a frightful upset."

"You seem to have worked it out to your satisfaction that it isn't workable, though how much of it is sincere I would very much like to know. It's something much deeper."

"Perhaps it is," she said.

With lulls and recoveries, so the quarrel passed to and fro. We had long passed the stage when either side makes any attempt to win over the other, by will, by strategy or by concession. We were in that inevitable, terrible state when the only thing thought of, or blindly followed, was to aggravate and distress the other. The deeper set the affection the profounder the morbid luxury this seems to be. So we plunged deeper and deeper into the morass.

Thus we reached the turning that branched away for Hampstead. Of course I invariably saw her home, and then struck across by cross roads, but now the sight of the road combined with the mood I was in, and I resolved to make an exception to my custom.

"You are going on, I suppose?" I said, coming to a halt.

"Well—yes," said she, halting too, and looking up at me in surprise.

"This is my shortest way," I said, and held out my hand.

She took it perplexedly. I held her hand in mine no instant longer than was necessary, and bidding her "Good-night!" I turned away, leaving her staring puzzledly after me.

"Oh, well!" I heard her say in careless resignation as she too turned on her way.

Though I held doggedly on my way I knew I had lost by that move. She could dismiss me far more easily from her mind than I could dismiss her from mine. I knew instantly that this was so. And, for my part, I was that night to prove the half of my intuition, for I paced to and fro, up and down my room till I was well nigh in a fever, and I could scarcely sleep, so was I maddened and tortured with my fury of thought.

II

A LITERARY EVENING

The following day, I remember, was a Saturday. Mr. Ramsay had asked me to go over to his rooms in the early evening, as he was expecting some of his friends in for a smoke and talk. I had considered myself very heroic (with the outward appearance of folly that heroism often wears) in resisting the invitation, inasmuch as my Saturdays were dedicated to Rhoda.

My chief did not come up on Saturdays, and I was therefore in charge in the event of anything turning up. So I sat at my desk that morning, with a sense of responsibility much diminished from that which had possessed me in the early days of my work, and brooded fiercely on the events of the preceding evening. All womenkind were attainted for me in the circumstance of Rhoda's faithlessness, and as I had walked

up that morning the first raw blasts of winter had swept round the corner of the shops at me, with the result that I muttered in a bitterness that may indeed have been exaggerated but which was intensely and darkly genuine :

" Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As Man's ingratitude."

Slowly the resolve grew up in my mind that I should not call for Rhoda that evening according to custom, but that I should go instead to Sloane Square. My mind jibbed like a timid mare at the resolve, but I gathered up the reins firmly and held myself to it, whatever the cost.

I was the first to arrive, and Mr. Ramsay greeted me with that warmth of heart that he knew so well how to blend with a reserved distinction of manner.

" Excellent ! " he said, with arms extended. " I hadn't expected it."

" I found myself at the last moment able to come."

" Unexpected pleasures generally contribute in fruition what they lose through lack of anticipation."

" Seen my uncle lately ? " I called back down the stairs to him.

" Yesterday. But you are a forbidden topic, I may tell you. He is as grumpy as five and quite extraordinarily taciturn. He isn't expecting your resolve to hold and is chiefly surprised at its continuing so long. It may be a satisfaction to you to know that he has got your department into an incorrigible tangle that it will be past the wit of any man to untie."

" How are they managing ? "

" He has taken personal direction of it together with his other work—with a further loss of equanimity."

" And Tim ? "

" Talks of leaving under the strain."

" Poor old Tim."

" He is coming to-night. I asked him chiefly out of a great compassion, for he misses you terribly."

I gave a great shout of joy.

Soon the others began to arrive, until the sitting-room became even difficult to see across owing to the rich clouds of

smoke given out by newly-lit pipes. Mr. Ramsay and I took it in turns to go down on the errand of admission and welcome—and it chanced that it was he who opened the door to Tim. Therefore, we could do no more than merely nod as he brought a cushion over and sat on the floor by my side. Being early, I was one of the half-dozen who had a seat: the rest, to their better comfort, being distributed on the floor.

Helping Mr. Ramsay to distribute the wine and the whiskey, I missed the opening of the conversation that was bubbling up here and there, and ordering itself into a unity that should embrace the company. It was for all the world like little springs spurting up here and there, each to join itself to some other, until finally, having at last linked up all round, they resolved themselves into one bubbling well, with always the tendency towards a partial disruption again.

When I was at liberty to listen I gathered that the discussion had centred on certain modern writers about whom my knowledge, I being chiefly bred on the great things of the past, was of the slightest. But as I listened to gather up what I could, the thing that puzzled me chiefly was not my lack of acquaintance with the subject-matter of their discussion, as my utter remoteness from what seemed to me the quaintness of their attitude towards it. I, at first, felt amazingly little and ignorant, not to say depressed. Then as I mastered their subject-matter my confidence rose. But I remained absolutely detached from their point of view, and so completely detached, indeed, that I could not even define the distinction between us. That their point of view seemed to rule among them all—at least, among all the active participants in the conversation—made the trouble all the stranger.

At last, in a lull of the conversation, when it seemed to swirl upon itself awhile, preparatory for a fresh departure, I broke out with:

“But does just writing, making books, literature in that sense of the word, matter?”

The conversation had paused before: it seemed to halt in astonishment now. The man who was, as it were, the main *croupier* of the conversation, laughed a short, uneasy laugh, that caused me to flush red.

“Well, I don’t know exactly what else does matter,” he said slowly, and seemed to pause as though not knowing quite

how long to let the halt hang on this intermission before sending the conversation on its serious flow again.

His manner was instinctively courteous—but as though courteous under aggravation. A heavy, stoutish man he was, with fat, clean-shaven cheeks, fair hair, a broad, commanding forehead and merry eyes. His voice sometimes rang up almost to a treble, and had always a pure, high quality.

If he was courteous it was more than I could say of the next speaker. He was sharp-featured, with dark complexion, black hair, roughly tousled with his fingers, and deep, lustrous dark eyes. His clothes hung loosely upon him, and a large black tie fell with wide ends over his waistcoat. He looked shrewdly and keenly on me, and I am convinced that he divined my point, but he turned about with a curt gesture.

"Except Life, Jenson," he said. "But what was it you were saying?"

My flush went a deeper hue, but with anger this time not less than confusion. Life—there was another word that I would have wished a definition of. I began to see the difference between us a little more clearly. They were, apparently, playing a little game between them, with words as counters to the game, words that remained undefined, or if defined, then with impure meaning and in journalistic senses. Life was one such word, and Literature, as I perceived to my perplexity, seemed to be another. Apparently any automatic or unworthy act of a man's day, or any clever pageful from a man's pen, were demonstrable parts of one or the other.

All this was in my mind, but in a nebulous way, as the interrupted conversation went forward. It was as though I saw more than I could quite clearly bring to focus. And, stinging under my rebuff, I turned to a man of my own age sitting beside me, and said with wrathful emphasis:

"Nothing that doesn't matter, matters."

Whereupon he suddenly sniggered, and then quickly caught his snigger by the throat, remembering that I had handed him some whiskey a short time before.

The others had continued their discussion, and were now seeking to appraise the works of a certain writer. Being unacquainted with them I could not bring an independent judgment to bear upon the matter, but I was bewildered at the absolute and ineradicable difference of opinion between Jenson

and the dark-featured man, whose name, it appeared, was Parkins. Jenson wished to set them on the citadel of heaven, Parkins had no wish so profound as to consign them to the nethermost hell. And all they had to say, however suggestively and wittily said, were after all but clever variations of these central desires. The others rallied in, some to Parkins' aid, some to Jenson's, but neither chieftain nor follower seemed to be able to bring any touchstone that could even so much as diminish the gulf set between them. I thought, as I heard them, that Jenson's method would be enough to establish any insecure fame, and Parkins' method sufficient to destroy belief in any beauty.

It was wonderfully clever. I have never met any man who was so subtle a debater as Parkins. He skirmished and fenced with an adroitness that was almost satanic; indeed, that was truly satanic in the sense that it sought only to destroy, without any reference to a faith or conviction of its own. But Jenson, in his bland, easy way, always seemed to avoid the snares set for him and sail down on his adversary's flank from a fresh quarter at the precise moment that the snare should have fallen due. Then the manoeuvring for position would begin again—Jenson, being on the defensive, not having the need for the rapidity of movement his opponent required. He had this disadvantage, however, as against Parkins: he had convictions; there were names in our literature that he was not content to abuse if to do so should serve his turn.

I listened to it with flattering bewilderment for a time; then I began to be merely tired by it, for it all seemed to matter so very little. I began in a dream to work out my own thought and to see my own vision of things, and would probably have soon left the company to their discussion, that meant, so far as I could see, no definite general gain, when Mr. Ramsay's voice breaking into the discussion struck on my dreaming ear.

He was lying back on cushions beside the fire, and his eyes were half closed as he peered through them on the two principals in the disputation.

What he had said was: "You men will go on discussing this for ever, or something like it, or something leading from it." What he continued to say, after a slight pause, was: "Why the devil, Jenson, don't you answer a question when

it's put to you, or find out what it means, and not assume immediately that it means nothing ? ”

“ Like your damned cheek,” Jenson said good-humouredly. “ But may I enquire, gently, what it is you refer to ? ” When he put those very courteous questions he seemed to chuckle with satisfaction over them.

“ Elthorne there asked you whether writing and making books mattered, or something like it. I must admit I scarcely saw his drift at first, and I'm none too sure I see it now, but as you fellows try and stamp out the virtue of Gordon's work, it seems to me you are trying the particular of his general.”

“ Scarcely that,” I stammered out. “ What I wanted to get at is, what is it makes a man's work matter ? I want to know for myself, which I suppose is a commonplace sort of thing to do. I do, nevertheless. I don't know this Gordon's work, but I take it he wrote poetry, or rather, some say he did, and some say emphatically he didn't. But what is Poetry ? ”

“ The best words in the best order,” someone glibly quoted.

“ Oh, and Prose ? ” I asked.

“ Any damned words in any damned order,” a long man laconically observed, gazing into the fire.

When the ripple of laughter had died away, I continued, with more hesitancy than before :

“ What I mean to say is this : so far as I know, the main difference between major and minor poets, to adopt a rough distinction that is familiar and not inaccurate, is this—poets who have something to deliver that is more to them than life, more than form, and more than skill of speech, and upon which the lesser things depend, and poets who are concerned with making well-wrought poems without any particular respect to any particular spiritual vision that those poems have to deliver.”

“ Bravo ! ” I heard Mr. Ramsay's voice ring out. But I heard it as a thing afar off, for I was engrossed by the thing I wished to say.

“ Take the great literature of the past, that has won through the years ! I doubt if you will find any great writer whose work does not pass us through an exalted spiritual discipline by the particular ritual in which he has caught and kept his spiritual vision.”

"Oh, the past," someone broke out. "Good God! Why, we have done with the past."

"Have we!" the man sitting beside Jenson pugnaciously said, with beetling brows and pursed-up lips.

"We are opening up a new order," someone else decreed.

"A statement, incidentally," Mr. Ramsay calmly observed, "that I imagine every year in the world's calendar has heard declared. But go on, Elthorne!"

"I believe literature, by its tense emotions, passes us through purifying fires for our greater personal life to be. You see," I continued, in a glow of joy at clearing up some of my own confused thought, "if this is what literature is to mean, then making a book or filling a sheet with writing scarcely seems to achieve it, does it? That's what I meant."

"Every damned thing based on assumptions, my friend," Jenson calmly observed. "It presupposes a deuced too much. Didactic too, as such things usually are."

"What do you mean by didactic?" I asked, puzzled.

"I'll bet he hasn't stopped to enquire," Mr. Ramsay chimed in. "It's good ball to knock ninepins over with. Is 'Sartor' didactic, Jenson?"

"Oh, ancient history, Ramsay, ancient history, old man!"

"You probably mean, not ancient enough. Very well, then: is Aeschylus didactic?"

"Most devilish!"

"Very well, I'm content to fall in that company."

"The company's pretty good, I don't deny."

"And remember! every time you use that careless word again your pet Aeschylus falls headlong, with a good few other of your loves, as I could demonstrate. Clean thinking means a pure choice of words and ideas, and that's a thing, Jenson, my friend, you'll never acquire so long as you argue."

While this had been going forward I had felt that both Jenson and Parkins saw my drift, but that to all the others it was no more than a jumble of words. I felt it, however, particularly with Parkins—probably because he was sitting near me. He had leant back in his chair, gazing fixedly at me through the curling wisps of smoke that rose from the bowl of his pipe. I have since noticed it as a curious habit of his, that he blew gently through his pipe, rather than drew on it, when meditating a ruse in argument. And as Ramsay and

Jenson bantered one another easily, like men familiar, each with the other's point of view, he said softly and gently to me :

" Ah, you're an anti-realist."

I had not at that time seen the profound difference between Realism and Actualism, between the striving after Reality by finding the significance of the cruder facts of life and the mere automatic reproduction of those facts, and I therefore took my first false step in assenting to the definition.

" So you won't have Balzac, eh ? "

My impression of Balzac was the second-remove impression of *rèpute*—which a subsequent reading has not greatly altered for me, I must say. And in the terms of that impression I was faced with a difficulty, for I saw the trap. I thought I had to forswear either my declared principle or a writer that appealed vastly to me. With more pluck than wisdom or knowledge I held by what I thought to be the commitment of my principle.

I have no memory of what followed. From some experience with Parkins' methods I can see now what he had done. He had fastened me on to an equivocation, and then haled me to and fro on its separate meanings till I was dizzy and silly. I only remember declaring my enmity against all sorts of things that I either liked well or had not sufficiently considered ; of avowing beliefs that I had put into my mouth and that I would willingly have spat thence ; of blushing furiously and stammering painfully ; of clouds of smoke that made my eyes to burn, till I feared that others would think they were filled with tears of vexation ; of Parkins' coal-black eyes, as they seemed to me, behind the smoke puffed gently from between his lips ; of Jenson's gleeful chuckle in the early stages, and, dimly, of his attempt to draw the battle on to himself in the end ; and finally of cool night air bathing my forehead as I took off my hat in Sloane Square to wipe the beads of perspiration that stood on it.

" Couldn't cough it out, could ye, what's say ? "

I looked down on Tim standing beside me. I had forgotten his very existence.

" Seems I made a damned fool of myself," I said. " I must think it out, Tim, for I know I'm right."

" What ho ! You were after something, I may say, and they wasn't."

Brave Tim ! How his words put heart into me that night !

" I think they call that being didactic, Tim."

" Crikey ! "

So we strolled up the street laden with heavy mists, expecting a rumbling bus any minute to overtake us. Then Tim spoke again.

" I ought to read a bit, you know, I ought, straight. I was knocked fair silly to-night, I may say. But, oh lor ! "

" Why don't you come and stay with me to-night ? Oh, you can't though ; I was forgetting your mother."

" Mother's a gonner."

No tone or description can convey the sense of desolation that lay in the resigned grimness with which he spoke those few pert words. An aloofness of manner that I had not particularly noticed in his previous demeanour now seemed suddenly to rush in to weigh the quiet phrase with tragedy.

" I say, Tim, I didn't know, you didn't let me know. I'm very sorry, old chap."

" No use worrying others, what's say ? There it just was. She was a plucky one, I may say. Not much to look at, you know, but—but what's good grizzling ? "

The night was bitter cold ; and I now began to know it. Nevertheless we sat on the top of the bus as it lurched homeward. We spake little, and the mists flew by gently, wrapping the lamps of night till they became no more than murky red halos glowing in the darkness of deserted streets and sleepy houses. Faintly a few stars could be descried overhead in the indefinable darkness of the heavens. It was as though some eternal car rolled onwards for ever, while three huddled figures sat moveless upon its benches. And street after street lurched slowly by as we rumbled on through a city of sleep.

III

A DECEMBER MORN

I determined on the Sunday that I would not visit Rhoda, but I knew very well it was idle coming to such resolves.

The early afternoon saw me leave Tim to his own desires while I took my customary way to Kilburn. Yet it should be said that, though I was drawn against my own resolves, I went with not the slightest intention of capitulation. Had there been any ear quick to hear words in steps, my stride, I think, would have rung with warfare.

Alas, for high resolves, however! I was met by the information that Miss Ermott and her friend had gone away for the week-end, and would not, indeed, be back till the Tuesday. Did the good landlady know where they had gone? No, she did not—and she seemed somewhat surprised at her interlocutor's lack of information, so that it was difficult to pursue the subject.

It was poor company Tim found me that night. What odd people some of us are! There was whiskey, there was excellent tobacco, there was a roaring fire by the mercy of God, and there was a friend who never intruded unnecessarily, who, whether he spoke or was silent, acted on an instinct that, with me, rarely failed, and was fullest company, yet I was the miserablest man in London that evening.

I was pulled on the wires of torment all night. I knew I fought at a disadvantage: if I tormented Rhoda now, I tormented myself twice as acutely in the process, whereas she was almost immune from the penalties she inflicted. So I went homeward with Tim to satisfy my restless torments with the semblance of action.

It was this made me walk all the way home from Shepherd's Bush. The night was bitter and raw, but I walked so furiously that I was bathed with perspiration. To find an outlet for my passions, or, rather, to stifle my racing thoughts, I addressed a somewhat too deliberately winsome maiden who paused hesitatingly on the crest of some area steps. Presently I suggested a walk.

"Oh, I can't," said she. "I've got to be in by ten, and it's past that now, ain't it?"

I produced my watch, and swore it was no more than half past nine, though it was a quarter past her hour.

"Only a little way then," she agreed.

It was not long before my arm encircled her waist, my lips folded over hers, and her head (prettily, if a little elaborately dressed out in curls, and surmounted by a large hat with a large feather) gently pressed to a resting place on my shoulder. But it all rang hollow. It was like drinking wine to deaden pain. And I—to whom such soft charms, though crudely incarnated, were always a full music in the blood—released her long before I need have done had her strength of will been the only opposition.

Like a wind brushing away a wisp of cloud she had gone from my memory almost before a hundred yards had interposed between us—which is not the usual effect of women upon me. I do not know what time I reached home. I know it was in the small hours of the morning and that the grate looked desolation itself with its low, flameless embers. My tormenting thoughts had reduced me to such a state of nervous exhaustion by that time—so utterly worn out was I—that I had no more energy than to slip off my boots, untie my collar, and fall into a heavy slumber with the blankets of my bed but half drawn over me.

The following evening I endeavoured to work. Indeed, I covered three pages of foolscap with some kind of automatic labour that had to be kicked into the fire the following day; and if it was not worthy workmanship it was a not altogether fruitless anodyne.

The next evening she herself opened the door to me, and we stood facing one another in the dim illumination cast by a flaring hall light.

"Well?" I asked, with an attempt at non-committal dignity.

"Well!" she replied, with challenge in her tone.

I was, I say frankly, afraid of her. It is one of the most curious things in life that women in certain characteristic moods always command fear in men. I turned to pleading.

"Do you think it was altogether fair to go off like that without letting me know?"

I knew the obvious response, and tuned myself to meet it.

"Well : and you didn't meet me as you arranged to—just out of spite, too ! "

"We can't very well talk here. Shall we go out ? "

She hesitated a moment. "It's no earthly good our going out if we're going to squabble, especially as it's a frightful night."

I said nothing, but stood there in silence. There are certain rhythms of power that a man may wield over a woman, and I had my hand on them now. It was curious the emotional interplay there was between us. She was rebellious, but I stood on in silence, and finally she went and put her hat and coat on and came out, as I knew she would.

"I had an excuse, I think, for my not turning up on Saturday, after what you had said on the previous evening."

"Excuses are easy to find if anybody's looking for them. Anyway, so had I." She was cold in manner, and her words were delivered as though she struck at me with a beak.

I decided on the swing of instinct that it was wise to avoid any reference to a subject when there was a patent Roland for every Oliver of mine, and to confine attention on what had now become to me the main theme of agony.

"Can't you see, Rhoda, what it means to me ? You know very well, dear girl, that if you had come to me at any time, and asked me to marry you, I would not have hesitated a single instant, whatever the circumstances, but would simply and naturally have done what you had a right to claim. You know that this is so, don't you ? "

"I'm built on a different mould, I suppose."

"No, I don't mean that, and I don't suggest it ; I simply can't understand you in this."

And so we were in it again. An introductory touch of frost had come into the air, with the result that the damp floating mists of the previous week, dropping moisture from lank trees on to the muddy leaves beneath, had now become a thick standing fog that gave a smart to the eyes and perished the blood in one's veins. (The effects of that fog may to this hour be descried on a copy of Balzac that I took down from my shelves, and which I then bore in my hand.) Save for a bus

or other vehicle, that crawled slowly along, with its conductor ahead brandishing a lantern and crying aloud, we had the streets to ourselves as we discussed the old subject with a simple repetition of the old dialogue. Only now it was more reasonable. The hour for the luxury of aggravating one another, that strange and unaccountable luxury of irritation, had passed.

Therefore, when I returned, though nothing had been gained that could be pointed to as gain, I yet felt progress had been made. Each evening that week told me the same tale. There was nothing else talked of between us, save in parentheses, except the one theme. At last she swept it all away and would none of it. Bitterly, and truly, she said that the one usurping topic was marring all things. It was cruel that I should continue so, and spoil all our kisses by making them the punctuations of a battle. Yes, yes, she loved me, but why could we not go forward without choosing for a perpetual conversation the one subject of dissension? Could she not see, I asked, that it was not a lack of love that made the subject so much to me—and that her attitude bore that suggestion far more reasonably, though I did not mean to impute it? Oh yes, she saw that, but she was made that way, she supposed. Certainly she could not say other than she had, and she could not tell why she thought as she did.

Two days of stiffness and awkwardness followed, and then the slow joy of "making it up" was taken up with keen delight by both of us. A succession of clear, sunny, frosty days was partly responsible for this. The thing of contention was put away. But it was there. The putting of it away only enforced its existence. Either one or the other of us was wondering if the other were thinking of it. It was there, it had got to be decided, and so long as we continued our relations to one another, which would have been impossible now, unthinkable even, to sever, there could be but one answer.

Therefore, it came about that one grey December afternoon two rather chilled mortals might have been discovered being thrown against one another by the lurchings of an omnibus that made its painful way towards a western railway terminus. Now and then he would turn about and steal a slow glance at her stiff, awe-stricken face. And she would look back at him

and smile bravely. At one of these timid interchanges she whispered.

"Are you sorry, dear?"

"Sorry for what, dear?" he asked.

"That you have—done it?" she responded, seeking for words to express the inexpressible.

"Dearest, I'm glad, very glad," he said, assuring himself with his own words, and seeking to grasp the stupendous fact that this creature he could now, in no play of endearment, call his wife, and all because a certain official had curtly asked them some obvious questions and extracted, by promptings, some obvious replies. It was all unintelligible. The very necessity of these formulæ had filled him with misgivings. Moreover, as she sat beside him, she seemed so changed and remote, even so far short of the bright requirement of the colossal change.

So the bus lurched onward, and the train sped westward into a pale sunset lit by a dusk saffron glow, over which, as it seemed, a dim veil of crimson gauze had been drawn. As this faded away a heavy mist crept over the earth with a coldness that penetrated to the bone, and a light drizzle spluttered on to the windows of the carriage.

So much I noticed before I saw a cluster of lights swimming in the distance like fireflies on the face of the waters; and I bent to kiss Rhoda tenderly once again before we drew in to the town of our choice for our brief holiday.

None knew of our marriage. We were neither of us of the kind disposed to admit any to our confidence because, by the cast of fortune, they chanced to be relatives. Moreover, the very nature, and secret exultation of security, of it was that it was to be a close affair.

IV

A TURN IN AFFAIRS

The paper that had found me shelter went the way of all such ventures. Within a year of its inauguration it passed from a weekly to a fortnightly publication. It declared boldly, even defiantly, that a fortnightly rhythm, for a journal that held so high an ideal of literary production, had more of nature in it than a weekly: and everybody at once recognised a euphemism for financial failure. This was evident from the immediate applications we received from those who had been regular contributors, and who suddenly seemed pressed for money. Then it passed to a monthly, and all the work was written by the staff—that is to say, the editor and myself. And so, when it ceased publication, hardly anyone noticed its demise.

I remember well the day I went out from that office for the last time. A first touch of spring was in the air, and the morning was bright and sunny. I had not expected the end so soon, though its prospect had caused me anxiety of no ordinary kind for months past. But on my arrival in the morning I had been handed a cheque to the end of that week, with the information that the paper would issue no more. So, on a morning when the air drank like nectar to the blood, I went out with bitterness and anxiety in my mind, and a packet of my books and general requisites under my arm.

The first man I went in to see was Parkins, whom I had come to know quite well. I admired his mental powers immensely, though I knew quite well that his wonderful comprehension and agility was for whatsoever use his shifting caprice might decide. For it was caprice he served, not personal advantage, and that was the only moral extenuation one could plead for him.

He at once, in a sudden access of sympathy, commissioned a number of articles for his paper from me. The value of this was somewhat diminished by the fact that he never paid, all the work being for the splendour and honour of being in print; but I agreed, nevertheless, and we proceeded to roam at will through the whole range of English Literature. The result was that I walked out in about an hour and a half like a king,

the freedom of expressing myself, and being understood, in all that Life and Being meant, raising me above the darts of presumptuous Time. Parkins would seek to disprove, at our next meeting, the very things that he now approved. But what mattered that? I walked down Fleet Street like a god.

A few spurnings at various papers, where I hoped to try and amend my fortunes by commissioned work, a little rudely shook my splendid exultation, and I went down to the City to find Frank.

"Well, how go things with you?" he asked, when we sat together over lunch.

"Come now," I responded, with enforced gaiety, "that's not so easy a question to answer. I don't know precisely in what sense to take it. I am a free man, if that has anything to do with it."

"You don't mean to say you have thrown up your post?" he queried in sudden alarm.

"Really I couldn't say. Thrown it up? Maybe it has thrown me up, or we may have thrown one another up. The brief of it is it has ceased to be. It is not. It was and is no more. It has vanished into air, into thin air, with all its concomitants of sub-editorial spendour and sublunary remuneration."

"You seem to be wonderfully perky about it."

God help the man! How little he knew of my emotions at that moment.

"One may as well say the best for the approved fact, I suggest."

So I spoke on to him, grimly enough could he have seen it.

"But whatever in the world will you do?" he asked, in a state of great concern.

I stared at him helplessly. Was not that very question only too patent to me, without his making it the worse by insistence? Could he not have encouraged me, or helped me, or sympathised with me, or at best talked of something else? A torrent of words struggled in my throat. I wished to recite to him that, if Life stood for anything more than an ugly rush for gain, however feebly in myself I at least wished to be true to its nobler meanings. I wished to tell him that in no line I had ever written, even though it were some review of a book that did not mean much to me, had I ever put a thought that I

would be ashamed to acknowledge at the assemblage of the nations, when the last trump sounds for the reckoning of the things of beauty and sincerity and the utter mockery and flagellation of the things of ugliness and triviality. I wished to let him know that the world to me was full of wonder and beauty, that it was increasingly so each day, whereas he and his kind were filling it with ugliness. I wished to pour out to him the plans on plans for books that lived in my brain, that I wished to create into beauty in so far as I might, without a thought of gain, if only a fair subsistence were ensured to me. I wished to tell him that only the previous morning I had had a book, the result of twelve months' ungrudging labour, returned to me from a distinguished firm of publishers—who made a great profession of ensuring the classics to the nation, but who never by any chance undertook any new man's work, waiting till by grave toil he had won his own position to turn about and trade on his fame with their wealth—with the comment that they feared they could not undertake it with any prospect of financial gain, an atheistical hideousness that would have been impossible had only a fiftieth portion of the men of London any conception of the sole indestructibility of Beauty.

But I was seated in a City eating-house, surrounded by men in ugly clothing, with ugly brains and ugly devices, doing work so ugly that God will in His two hands tear it asunder, and fling it back in the faces of its makers. I was seated opposite a man who was my own brother, for whom, as a boy, I had fought battles, who, with me, had known neglect, and with whom, in those days, I had found so close an understanding that it dared express itself only in gruffness lest it should tumble on a sentimentality abhorrent to the heart of a boy; but who was a part of that whole ugly system. And I was, perforce, silent, though the tears stood heavy in my eyes.

He had begun some melancholy chant about ways and means when he saw them, and he hurriedly proceeded with his meal.

We said little during the rest of that meal. He began, once or twice, some further investigation as to what I proposed to do now that the greater bulk of my livelihood was gone; but I took no notice of him. He had no divination of moods, and

therefore had not the divine gift of appropriate silence, so that I was glad when we came to part.

"I am very sorry, old chap," he said, more sympathetically, in parting.

"Oh, we shall pull through, I have no doubt," I responded. Brothers? What are brothers save the mutual notes in a chord of music? I resolved that I should never see him again.

V

"FORTUNE KNOWS WE SCORN HER MOST WHEN MOST SHE
OFFERS BLOWS"

"You're early, aren't you?"

"And so I thought I'd call for you."

We hardly thought of one another as husband and wife. Neither did we think of one another as unmarried lovers. There was something of both in it, and the result was a sense of comradeship that was admirable. Usually I called for her, or she for me, later in the evening. But on this evening I had waited for her in a certain turning off Piccadilly down which she always came on her way home. And we now walked along it in silence.

"Anything the matter, dear?" she asked.

She was looking up at me in close scrutiny, I knew, and I dared not return her glance. So I dropped her arm out of mine, and put mine within hers instead.

"Jack!" she asked again, with a note of alarm in her voice, "what's the matter, dear?"

I bit on my lips fiercely to hold back my tears. Fortunately the turning was unfrequented, for my attempt was a poor one, and she was all solicitation.

"Oh, damn it!" I exclaimed, brushing my tears away,

"why can't a man be able to stop making a fool of himself like this?"

"What is it, dear?"

"Only that the paper's done with—oh, and I feel failure in me."

"Poor old chap!" she said, taking my hand and caressing it.

We did not go homeward but turned into the Park. The roar of traffic surged north and south along streets of flaming orange lights and glittering white lights and burning ruddy lights, lights dim and lights brilliant in avenues of noise; but the Park was dark and secret. We roved through the paths in the profound silence of sympathy. In his smaller moments Man uses words to thread together a sequence of logic; in his greater moments he uses them to convey the sounds, the precise tones and chords, that are more full of significance to his eternal soul than all the tissue of thought. And so, when we spoke, we paid no heed to the words we chose, but gave them the musics they required. We were never so much at-one-ment as then, while we wandered beneath the trees, by the side of the waters, through the intersecting paths between the various bushes.

It was much later that she said: "Suppose, dear, that we live together. Don't you think that would be better?"

"Oh, how I wish we could! And God bless you for that word, dear! But how can we at this of all times?"

"Just as you wish, Jack dear. Only I am quite willing."

But the idea held me breathless. It seemed to me the very manner of thing to arrest and hearten—not only me, for that was half the concern, but both of us, for we were bitterly discouraged, though she, womanlike, lost her disappointment in comforting me. It grew upon my mind with a grimness of satisfaction.

"Yet, I don't know," I said presently. "It would be taking up the challenge, wouldn't it? And to take up a challenge is half-way to winning a fight."

"Let us do it, Jack," she said, and I could hear a tone in her voice that bade me know that she was weary of our waiting.

"If only it did not mean privation for you."

"It need not, perhaps. I think I could keep on with my

post, or if I didn't I could soon get another; and Mrs. Thompson, I think, already half knows we are married." Mrs. Thompson was my landlady, and a kindly, if careless, soul.

" We should each keep our own accounts."

" You wouldn't be proud, Jack ? "

" I suppose one might call it pride. I mean to win my own battle, anyway, Rhoda."

" Would you be proud with me, Jack ? "

" My own dearest, I owe you now what I can never repay in love. But let us have it as I say, dear. You may call it pride or what you will, but if a man loses his independence he loses half himself."

We let the matter rest at that, for much had to be done, and the gradual pleasure of anticipation had to be enjoyed.

Then, to my complete astonishment, Frank came round to see me. Under those childish punctilios that seem to sway men in times of disagreement it was, I had divined, a rule laid down by Jacob Mueller that I might be known and recognised, but not my separate dwelling. On the two occasions when he had written to me he had addressed me at the office. Frank had done the same, and when we met it was usually for dinner somewhere. Therefore his visit to my room wrought wonderment in me. I forgot that I now had no other port of call.

" I was going to write to you, but I thought I would come and see you instead."

" Good ! Have some baccy ? "

" Thanks, no ! I'll have one of my cigarettes."

There was a curious exultation and triumph about him that puzzled me considerably. But I waited for what he had to say rather apathetically. Numbly I wondered how very far this man and I had wandered apart. Even his sympathy failed to reach me, for I dimly divined that he was brimming with sympathy.

" You know, Jack," he began, " how very sorry I am for you in this present fix of yours. I am afraid, the other day, I wasn't very helpful, but my mind was so full of other things, and this thing came upon me with such a shock. I have been thinking a lot about it since, and I've been having a go at Uncle Jacob. Well, anyhow, to come straight to it, and not

waste time beating about the bush, I have got him to agree to take you back. Just a minute, before you say anything. I have also got him to agree to give you a hundred and fifty a year. I think he sees that you were not paid adequately before, although, naturally enough, he won't admit it straight out. Now I think you will admit that this is pretty fair. He only stipulates that you live at Hampstead. I know you won't like that. I know you don't like him, although I think you are too much inclined to look on his faults and not on his virtues. But it's not a very great deal, is it? And I'm glad if I've been able to be of any use."

I was genuinely moved—and almost to tears by reason of the helplessness of the situation. Was it never possible for either of us to come near the other?

"Do you think," I expostulated, "I would ever go into that vampire's web again?"

"I know he is a bit of a vampire, my dear chap," he replied, "but you're not precisely in the position to be fastidious, are you?"

I stared at him amazedly. Here he was peaceably, on the quiet instinct of his soul, agreeing to the application of the word vampire to Jacob Mueller, and yet, if I were to draw his attention to its full implication, he would have repudiated it indignantly as an impossible and fantastical extravagance. Moreover, what a commentary on our boasted civilisation was his remark! I was to receive pay in order to live in order that my employer might derive from my vitality! Little wonder that there was some warmth in my response!

"Good God! I'll shoot myself first, and, if need be, I'd shoot Rhoda first."

"Rhoda? Who's Rhoda?"

"Oh yes, by the way, and what about my wife? Where does she come in?"

"Your wife? You don't mean to say——" He hesitated at this, not knowing whether to treat the matter with alarm or as an infinite joke of mine.

"Don't mean to say what?"

"She doesn't live with you here, does she?" He was still in perplexity, and was attempting to reinforce his ranks of incredulity by a rapid glance around the room, and the lack of any feminine influence it displayed.

"She hasn't to the moment. But she is coming to do so next week."

"Oh, you're a fool," he flamed out. "I lose all patience with you."

"Look here, Frank, you are at entire liberty to think me a fool. I have no doubt you are entirely right in your surmise. But I'll not be addressed as you have just now addressed me by any man in the world, least of all by you."

"I had better go, I think," he said, rising.

"Perhaps you had better. Don't think, however, that I bear any ill-will. I don't in the least degree. In fact, I am sincerely obliged to you for all you have attempted to do; very sincerely obliged to you. But don't, on the other hand, think that, because it is the rule in your vile commerce for one man to take advantage of another's misfortune to trespass on the divine rights of his personality, you are going to be permitted to take advantage of my misfortune in the same way. Good-bye!"

I could have wept with the helplessness of it. But that would not have helped matters in any way. There was only one thing for me to do, and I did it. I threw him out of my mind.

VI

LITERARY MATTERS

Friendship, I imagine, is in its wider sense of two kinds: there is the friendship of habit, and there is the friendship of instinct. I had several friends (Parkins, in a way, was one) who were of the first order, and with whom friendship would cease when I fell out of the habit of it. Tim, and particularly Mr. Ramsay, were of the latter order. And the latter in a manner includes the former. I might fall out of the habit in

their case, but the fact would remain. It is even independent of the former, for I have met those with whom my soul imperiously demanded friendship, that a cowardly submission to convention, or an unhappy sloth of mind, has prevented it.

Mr. Ramsay was away in Paris when my misfortune fell, but when he returned, and I had told him of it, his response was direct and instinctively accurate. He got my book placed.

He sent me with a letter to a small publisher who read it, and told me that it was little likely to cover the cost of publication. He added, however, that he could not in conscience let it pass, as it had meant something to his own soul. Would I leave it with him awhile? In the end he issued it. I have always had an instinct that Mr. Ramsay supported him in its loss at first, but to this hour I do not know this for certain, feeling, somehow, it was not honourable to enquire. Yet the irony is that I have now before me a letter from the same house of publishers whose initial refusal, though expected, caused me such bitterness at the time, suggesting a re-issue of my early books. They are willing to trade in me now that others have done the honest and honourable work.

How proud I was, and how Rhoda thrilled, when at last it faced me in print. It was a wild, tumultuous thing, for which I have always thereafter felt a strange distaste, despite the fact that it contained in germ, of thought and artistic conception, most of my work since. It was crude, of course it was crude, that is the only thing that atones for it to my present thought, for if a man do perfect work in his youth, it can only be a little perfection, and his work will soon find its period, since it will revolve on a repetition of that littleness. If that strange type of being, the literary critic, had existed in days gone by, would the author of "Love's Labour Lost" or "Two Gentlemen of Verona" ever have been permitted to thrive slowly onward to the colossal powers of his great tragedies? I rather question it. Indeed, I would attribute the curious coincidence of littleness and perfection of skill that betokens our latter-day work to the presence of none other than that abnormal onlooker on Art. There was never a type of being, by function or inclination, less disposed to the godlike faculty of looking before and after.

It was confessedly ambitious. It was adventurous. I entitled it "Yarborough Harland: An Artistic Study." A good deal of the indecision, the halting praise, the intermittent contempt and lofty patronage it at first evoked was owing to the fact that it was neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. Harland was the eponymous hero, not for a sequence, or plot, of events that befell him, but for a growth of artistic opinions that he enshrined in a series of dramas that I examined in detail as though they had indeed been written. One of my reviewers, I remember, commented that he, at least, had never heard of this Yarborough Harland, and that I consequently must have greatly overrated his plays! It is obvious that a book so schemed gave me a wide opportunity of airing my own opinions on literature; and I was not altogether guiltless of putting up ninepins for the particular pleasure of knocking them down. For instance, I dealt somewhat fully with the theme of my encounter with Parkins in Mr. Ramsay's rooms, and, as I was distinctly friendly with Parkins at the time, he favoured me with a very comforting eulogy of the book and its opinions.

I examined, too, the progress of Harland's life, the growth and development of his character, and how these found an echo in his dramas, direct in effect or disguised through the bend of characterisation. There were none to point out that, the life and work being equally at my disposal, I could clearly cause one to coalesce with the other the better for my comment; and of this I was glad, for I had been at some pains to deal honestly in the matter, to follow carefully the respective lines of development my intuition perceived in each, and so to draw the influence of cause and effect with justice and judgment. I relied in this, excusably considering my immaturity, on the effects of action and reaction as I perceived them in the works of the creative masters.

I cannot complain of the reception of my book. It was not good, but then it was not bad. It was chiefly puzzled. One benefit it brought me was that I slowly, with accompanying persistence on my part, was enabled to procure reviewing and other journalistic work on the basis of my name having become slightly known. I also, shortly thereafter, received a commission to write a book on the novels of Disraeli. It duly appeared the following year, and I found the restrictions

of a known author and known works were by no means a joy so thrilling as the erection and creation of my own. But on the night following the covenant of that commission I scarcely slept for wildness of excitement.

Yet the main benefit of the book to me was its effect on those two who meant most to me in life, Mr. Ramsay and Rhoda.

"An excellent book, mainly an inspiring book, Jack," the former wrote to me in a letter still full of warmth to me despite its many readings, "which is to me, and I imagine to most, the primary virtue of a book. I have so formed the habit of contemplative reading (as I think you also will) that my one reading of it is equivalent to several readings, and there never was a book of worth that revealed itself, gave up its soul, on one scanning. Yet I shall read it again, be sure. Full of faults, of course, but, in the main, right. That you do not esteem life cheaply, and that you have a vision of things you would happily go to the stake for, is manifest on every page, in, and not only in spite of, your faults and follies; and it is a brand of greatness. I say greatness, Jack, advisedly. Just praise to an earnest man never exalts, it humbles. So I say greatness. Never budge from that. Never huckster it. But then I do not think you will."

And he was right. He did not exalt, he humbled me. When I saw him next our interchanges were mainly in silence. God bless him, he always filled me full to overflowing.

Rhoda said little. That is, to me she said little. I heard once that in a company, when somebody belittled my faulty book, she spoke keenly and warmly of the greatness of its writer. (I put these things down simply, for they are the facts of a life.) No one who ever met her thought this a mere wifely judgment. She had no mere wifely loyalties. It was more than that, or nothing. Our hold on one another was no bond of marriage, and that was the danger of it. Perhaps that was why, paradoxically enough, I had fretted for what I rashly considered a marital security.

Yet it was in little things she showed her mind, little things that touched me inexpressibly. She was not one to show mental deference to any man or woman, though more to woman than to man, but she began to concede this to me with a curious delicacy. I noticed, too, that she began to brush

away anything that might disturb me at my work. Such attendances were little to my liking. But I could say or do nothing. She was one temperamentally so little inclined to services of such a nature that to have taken notice of them would have been a violence given to her nature. Therefore I had to endure them, being extraordinarily moved by them. It was something, I felt, that boded no good, somehow.

VII

A TURN IN AFFAIRS

It was just this that, in the years that passed, provided the most bewildering element in our life, and that opened the way to an end that I do not profess to understand, but which I must set down in all its amazing inexplicability.

Rhoda was one destined to move in her own orbit. Setting aside that lower form of union, that is no union, in which one side dominates, and quells the vitality of, the other (the woman the man almost as often as the man the woman, I confess I believe), marriage is chiefly of two kinds. There is the rare kind where the man and the woman coalesce. It is rare, and I do not think it often transpires, save when the man is older than the woman, and a complementary relation is thus achieved. There is the more familiar kind when each side can only meet the other in emotional sympathy, and must be content to let the other take his and her own orbit.

Now Rhoda was not of the kind to coalesce with anyone. Her mind was too brilliant, too eager, too hard (if I may say so in the best sense) for that. She made the better companion, indeed, because of that, for, in the very severe years that followed, she did not cheer me by coming into my blood and warming me, but by standing opposite me and calling on me.

How I was to her I cannot say. I imagine mine was the other method, for the glory of a woman is (as in my male way I think, and endeavour justly to think) that she can be comforted best when she can forget her distress in the act of comforting another. Men are softer-hearted than women; women are vastly severer than men.

Therefore when Rhoda began to defer to me, and, in an unwonted spirit of docility, to leave me the centre of the picture without seeking the centre of another picture for herself, there were moments when, released a little from the strain of thinking on other things, I felt very uncomfortable.

For it meant something very great in any case, and something particularly acute in our case. It may be desirable or not to give up the centre of a smaller picture in order to occupy the lesser company of a larger and more splendid picture. Men, and particularly women, are making that decision every day—and not, I believe, with enviable fruit accruing to their decision. But to become part of the lesser company of a small, neglected, and decidedly penurious, picture, is quite another matter. The stoutest loyalty may not bear it. It is a matter of temperament.

Our sleek magistrates on their very comfortable salaries are every day deciding that it is a crime for starving men to appeal to their fellow-men for assistance, or to take bread without payment from those who have a surplusage of it—just as, if those same starving men decide to make a hastier end of matters, they commit them to prison in order to cheer them, and comfort them, and make their lives better worth living. I do not know what I would have done could I not have appealed to my fellow-men. Many a time, under the excuse that over-eating hindered the clarity of my mind while I was at work, I have gone hungry in order that there might be food enough in our larder for Rhoda's subsequent meals; and many a time have I turned to Mr. Ramsay for a loan, knowing I should probably never pay it back. At first I told Rhoda when I did this, but she had a hot pride that was as sensitive as raw flesh, and she physically quivered at the thought of such an indebtedness. So I ceased it, but, in his quiet way, that noble man noticed certain things in my demeanour, and in our rooms too when he came, with the result that he forced loans on me again. I knew it coming, I noticed his

eye quietly travelling about the room one night, and when he asked me to walk to the corner of the road with him, I knew what was coming. But I told Rhoda nothing. She imagined that certain articles I had to do to keep my name about before editor's eyes, were being paid for, which were really empty honours.

In the country it is possible to run credit with tradesmen ; indeed, as I well know, nearly all our county families are run on that system, families of wealth but of ostentatious notions outrunning their wealth. In London, however, tradesmen have a more fluid population to cope with. Moreover, Rhoda's just pride again introduced itself, and it would have been impossible for us to have subsisted thus even had it been permitted us. I know well the customary cheap wisdom will be meted out to me. But let this be taken into consideration—I was working twelve to fifteen hours a day strenuously : was that not worth a decent livelihood ? One knows all about moralities, but moralities are dismissed in an immoral state ; they are an impertinence then ; and any state where a man who works hard, works truly, works earnestly, to the end of beauty, may starve therewithal, is a thoroughly immoral state by any reckoning. Any state where men may starve is not a state of society, it is a state of brigandage. There is no society in it.

Anyway, so it was. Hunger, when there is food, is an insult to the god in man, and Rhoda and I have had to endure that insult often. Her employer began to be very restive when he gathered that she was married. It doubtless slipped out in the implications of her conversation, but he certainly became aware of it. He was very cold and stiff with her though he actually did not dismiss her. He desired to, it was clear. But he undertook a lecturing tour in America, and so her salary then ceased. On a similar previous occasion it had been continued at half the rate until his return. She then began to undertake typewriting, with a small success.

So we struggled on. Rhoda was courage itself, and her faith in me never wavered. Yet the fact that I had no part to play meant that she had no part to play, and I winced at this, because I saw that, under all her courage, she chafed at it. Spiritual and physical starvation are a combination hard to

resist, and I saw a state of affairs coming about that cried aloud for some turn in the tide.

And it came. I remember how it came; an innocent rivulet that was to widen and roll onward unceasingly. I had come home one evening after my usual tramp round the weary roll of editors, from whom I might expect the journalistic work that was my precarious livelihood, and had been met by the usual question from Rhoda.

"Well, how did you get on to-day, dear?"

"Not so badly. But why will men go out of the way to try and get men to sell their souls?"

"I suppose as long as they give you cash down for them it's a fair offer."

"Humph."

"What was it?"

"Oh, only Robinson. Says I'm a sheer waste. He had just been reading 'Henry Hibbert' at Jenson's invitation, and says that the man who wrote that could write a devilish good yarn, and why the devil doesn't he do it?"

"Henry Hibbert: Artist" had been my third book, and had aroused little enough attention. But Jenson had become an admirer of it (chiefly induced, I believe, by Mr. Ramsay, who was my good angel), and for Jenson to like was for Jenson to proselytise. It was the supremely excellent thing about him.

"I think you make a great mistake talking to men about your books. They don't see what you mean; if they do they don't care a snap about it, and anyway it discourages you. Why don't you go right on with it quietly?"

"I should, I know. But Robinson's got a notion that the form of the short story wants reconstruction. He's an odd man, he has the wildest notions at times of artistic re-creation, and yet he never moves away from the crude commercial. He suggests that I should write stories for his magazine now. I said I could, not only because one may as well do one kind of pot-boiling as another, so long as it is of a sort that does not mar better work, but because I think I could get said some of the things I want to, in that scope. I began to be hopeful, and then, suddenly, he comes down with insistence on the heavy-trowel. 'You're writing for eternity, I suppose, Elthorne,' he said. 'Damn eternity. I want strong stuff

for my readers. You make a great mistake thinking this need not be good Art. It can be, and it must be, or I won't have it. But blast your eternity.' I suggested that the difference was the impermanent in artistic form, and the permanent in artistic form, thinking to outwit him. But he leapt on to it, and damned the permanent roundly. So there you are, just as we were before, except that the offer is still open."

Then much later in the evening she said: "I say, Jack, do you think I could do those stories for you?"

"In what way, dear?" She was an excellent and keen critic of novels, and often used to do some of my reviews of them for me.

"Well, write them, and, if you like them, you send them in as yours. Only if you like them, that is."

"You be blowed! If you do them, dear girl, I'll try and place them for you."

"I won't do that. For one thing, it would be faithless, in a kind of way to you, and to your work, for that is the real work; it matters." She had my very phrase in that, and it well illustrated her attitude.

"Well, I can't do your work under my name, can I?" The whole thing was scarcely serious to me as yet. I did not want to say that in my, possibly fastidious, judgment, it might detract from my better work if it came under my name. And certainly, if the work were hers, she should have the credit of it. I did not desire it; she probably would; and in any case it would be franker.

"But I don't want to be faithless to your ideal."

"Oh, it won't be that."

"Then I haven't the knack of writing, or of devising things."

"Well, let's have an attempt together."

So that evening we spent devising situations, and constructed several. The following morning I had forgotten all about it. Not so she; for a month thereafter she, with a timorousness so foreign to her nature that I clasped her to me in an aching emotion, showed me three such stories: our original three, worked over and reconstructed many times. If I say I was moved to infinite tenderness I stand to be convicted as the egregious male; yet so it was. Devising things is a knack that may grow by custom. In those stories she

had not discovered it, but we worked at them together, with the result that I sent one of them to Robinson.

He promptly accepted it. Moreover, he printed it within three months, and professed himself eager to see more. It appeared under the name of Ermott Jacob as suggesting our alliance in its concoction.

Within the next year Robinson printed five short stories by Ermott Jacob, and there were others placed elsewhere. Sometimes the plot was by me, sometimes by Rhoda, but always the first writing by Rhoda, whereupon we overhauled it together, and she wrote it again. That was the procedure: my part was the superintendence of unity, and the introduction of a larger suggestion behind the situation, though it often occurred to me that the popularity of the tales would have been improved had I kept my portion of the work within exacter limits.

Certainly there seemed a turn in affairs. We moved out of the rooms where we had lived for eight weary, terrible, and yet, in the retrospect, gloriously strenuous, years, and took a small house.

VIII

ERMOTT JACOB

It was curiously characteristic of my attitude towards that strange person, Ermott Jacob, that I told Mr. Ramsay nothing of him, and even hid his existence from Tim and Frank, the first of whom looked in regularly to have a smoke with me, and the latter of whom I used to meet now and again for dinner. It was right that I should, moreover, for he was only a quarter my property, three-quarters at best in just due being Rhoda's creation. The letters that now and then came, by way of a magazine, for Ermott Jacob, were appropriated by Rhoda.

They contained thanks for benefits received by the devotees of that form of fiction ; and also, by no means least, comments on the destinies of their respective heroes, which, taken in the bulk, were an excellent guide as to the tastes of their public. Strange to say, those letters were as regular and persistent as they were gushing and freely-helpful : they betokened an interest in these highly-coloured creations that was as staggering to me as they were a salutary reminder to Robinson on the painful matter of an increase in rate of pay. In fact, they caused me to have less than ever to do with Ermott Jacob ; my place, as advisory counsel, being slowly taken by the correspondence itself.

" I am glad to see you getting on, old chap," Frank said one evening, when, having heard that we had taken a house, he had come up to spy into the land. He was a highly successful man now, with a flat at Hampstead, and a wife whom I had seen thrice, and Rhoda once on the occasion of their marriage. We moved on the two planes that are careful never to meet, success and failure.

I flushed at his remark, and turned the conversation. Which, when he was gone, caused Rhoda to remark :

" I don't see why you should be ashamed of Ermott Jacob, Jack."

" No, dear ? Well, I'm not, in a way. But, you see—well, it's a difficult thing to explain."

" I think you mean you are ashamed."

" It's not me, is it ? "

" It's me, then."

" Oh, I don't mean it in that way. I mean—well, you take my other work. You take this," and I laid my hands on " Fairholt Evans : A Study in Mysticism and Art," my fifth book that lay in proof sheets on my desk ; " it's I, because it's better than I am, more than I am ; the substance of what it wishes to deliver will concern man, in my faith, through all the progress of his eternal destiny. You know what I think about it, Rhoda. It's breath and being. Men, even when they turn to the lower things, nevertheless are spiritually polarised to these things. They can never divest themselves of them. One sunset is enough to set them ringing great chords in their souls, chords that give them discomfort as well as joy, and which they therefore seek to stifle. Good God,

Rhoda, what is there of that in Ermott Jacob? Are not the two things, indeed, diametrically opposed: God and Mammon?"

"You are willing to live on Ermott Jacob's mammon, anyhow, my dear."

Like a bird I was winged. I began to wish Ermott Jacob had never been born. I saw Ermott Jacob as a truck with the great enemy of my contention. I said no more, but left the house.

It was late before I returned, and Rhoda was asleep in bed. Though I enjoy a good straight conflict, I am not one who loves a wrangle, it is rather my habit to withdraw myself and say nothing; consequently, the following morning, feeling sore and wounded, I hardly spoke a word to her, but kept closely to work. Also, an impulsions came irresponsibly upon me to go to Mr. Ramsay in the evening, and as I knew Rhoda would at once have guessed the purpose of my visit, and resented it, I rather accentuated the coldness in order that a lack of conversation should absolve me from explanation.

Ramsay now lived in Kensington, and he greeted me with his usual cordiality. But directly I came into his presence I stepped into a certain knowledge, just as one may step round a cliff edge and suddenly see a wide plain whose details are too intricate to be grasped. I could not then have stated what I knew; but I knew it, nevertheless. It was like those great intimations of divinity and beauty, those glimpses of stupendous being and power, that are caught by man's intuition, and escape on the rebound before his tardy intellect can ensnare them into thoughts.

Yet, in retrospect, it may be put thus: I knew that Ramsay knew who Ermott Jacob was—or rather, I knew that he thought Ermott Jacob was one and identical with Jacob Elthorne. I knew other things too. He had lent me from time to time a considerable amount of money, which, had I wished to return to him, he would have refused firmly and decisively, would, indeed, have taken as a breach of friendship: but I knew now that he felt a right to its return, inasmuch as I had breached the great trust of an unswerving ideal. I had stepped out of the province where commerce was an insolence to the baser lands where it was an expectancy.

I was not altogether comfortable, and I took an early occasion to tell him that I was busy correcting the proofs of "Fairholt Evans."

"It'll be the best thing I have yet done, and by a considerable deal. I am calling it a Study in Mysticism and Art, and I think you will see from that that I am saying a good many things that are blood and breath to me. I wish you had put me on to poetry in the early days, Ramsay, for the things I want ruin by mere application, and prose always applies and says where poetry creates and sings. If I hadn't wished to do a bit of hitting in 'Yarborough Harland' I'd have seen that. Oh yes, I have tried the odic tongue, but it's too late now to capture suppleness and subtlety in it. I must stick to my form, though, God knows, the thing I want to say demands Being, not Becoming, poetic song, not prose statement."

"I hadn't thought of that, Jack. You are right, though. It's rather a pity." His manner was just the same, but we had, nevertheless, stepped into a different air.

"I can, however, give it a certain fulness my way: I can, I must, make the implications more explicit my way."

"Is Evans a failure like Harland?"

"Yes. He must be: the development demands it; what the asses call the artistic inevitability, not knowing that artistic inevitability, and moral discipline, and spiritual outcome, are all different expressions of the one thing that is greater than them all. Oh, it'll be fatuously reviewed, I make no doubt; the praise as little to the matter as the blame."

"Look here, Elthorne," Ramsay broke out earnestly, "you are more in this than I am. Let us, in the name of the great and terrible God, be frank with one another. You are seeing things I am not. You are leading and helping me, and I thank you for it. If I've helped you ever, you are paying me now in coin nobody else could cast for me, and in eternal benefit and welfare—bene-fit and well-fare, my friend. So now tell me, why is it that these fine men of yours must fail? Why is it failure seems so much more splendid, so much more moral, so much more beautiful than success? Why is the mission of Christ transfigured by failure when it would be devastated by success? I have said to you it is so, I am

unbroken in that faith ; but why, why, why ? Is it not possible to devise conviction on the lines of success ? Or, at least, ought not such a thing be possible ? ”

There was silence between us for a moment. He had never made me guide before on the spiritual heights, and I was humbled and afraid.

“ Well, this is how I see it (I wished to call him ‘ sir ’) : is it more blessed to give than to receive ? To give, obviously : even your trading curmudgeon gives his lip-service to that. Well then, this is how it seems to me : when a man closes up his account on the earth, either one of two things happens ; either the world is in debt to him or he is in debt to the world. If he is in debt to the world, and leaves it so as he goes, leaves it unabsolved—well, he is a cad ; there’s nothing moral about him, nothing beautiful, nothing desirable ; he is, in short, a cad, and there’s an end on’t. But if the world is in debt to him, he goes out smiling, triumphant : to the degree of the debt outstanding he stands above all his debtors : no man can say a word against him till he has cleared up his portion of the debt—which he can never do. And so, in that degree, he has power, beauty, moral grace. Yet what is the successful man but the man who, in the very degree of his success, has himself in debt to the world ? And what is the failure but the man who, in the degree of his failure, has given more than he has received, and who has the world in debt to him ? It’s God and Mammon again—oh, my God ! ”

Ramsay said something energetically and briskly, which I did not hear, and strode about the room taking no notice of my distress. He apparently addressed some further question to me that I did not hear, upon which he turned about and exclaimed :

“ But what’s the matter with you, eh ? ”

I stood up slowly and faced him. There were to be no unworthy secrecies in this matter.

“ Well, it is this way : if a man holds fast by the highest, if he do not trade with it but serve it, I say,”—Ramsay’s eyes were steady on me, for he saw what was coming—“ it may be by some cast of Fortune’s, very rare in the main, but a recompense of reward will come his way even to the envy of some trader. That may spoil his work, or it may not ; it will certainly tempt him, but it may possibly not mar him. In

any case that does not affect the matter : it is too rare to count, and the fact that he has not sold himself for gain holds him clean. In fact, nothing can absolve the debt incurred by the world for a thing not done for gain—I tire you ? ”

“ No, go on ! Take your time.”

“ Oh, I’ll get straight to it. But what would you say to a man who ladled out thick sentiment for gain ; sloppy wish-wash with a pseudo-artistic slime on it for hard cash ; tawdry tinsel that debases the royal coinage of man’s soul because he was paid jolly well for it ? ”

“ It’s done every day.”

“ Oh yes, but to a man who has seen a vision, and turned aside from it ? ”

“ Much shall be forgiven to a man who has worked his day, and has a slender larder, and no decencies of life, despite it.”

“ Oh, I don’t know.”

There was a considerable pause between us.

“ We were talking, I take it, of Ermott Jacob,” he then said.

“ Damn Ermott Jacob. Yes, damn Ermott Jacob. I wish I could get clean again.”

“ You’re taking it too severely, Jack. Many a fine, true-hearted artist has had to do much worse, for really the stories are not at all so bad. You must not be morbid upon it. I admit I was disappointed when I heard of it, for I thought you would turn away from the expression of your vision. But what you tell me of your new book more than clears that. It’ll be bad for you, I suggest, if you let a morbid disgust run away with you. Hack-work must be done in the present state of affairs, and it may even be made a discipline. The only evil is if a man forgets to distinguish what is hack-labour and what is the work of his soul.”

“ Oh, it isn’t that, Ramsay. It’s the very devil more than that. I believe it would mar my judgment, spoil my touch for the thing that matters ; but it isn’t that. Rhoda, you know, has charge of Ermott Jacob.”

“ Ah, I wondered. I thought I caught a mind at work that wasn’t yours, that struck quickly and a little petulantly like hers.”

“ I’m not shuffling, you know. I have no wish to play ancient Adam. I began Ermott Jacob, it was my work at

first, and she helped me. But now she does it all, practically."

"I see."

"Yes, my brave Rhoda, who sang me cheer, and never once flinched, all these years, not only for my sake (so I hope, for I am not quite so egregious a male), but for the sake of the work that is so much more than either of us. She would never have let me turn aside, had I wanted to. But now she has taken up Ermott Jacob, and, God bless my soul, believes in Ermott Jacob too. We gave up children for my work, we gave up—oh, comfort, and all the integument of desirable life, for its fine sake, finding it worth while when it looked least like it. And now, this!"

"I'm sorry, old man. These things have a knack of spreading."

"Surely. Ermott Jacob is more or less harmless now, but—! Oh, I don't want to be disloyal to Rhoda. I never have been. But I can't talk it over with her—she can cut like a whip, and I wanted to talk it over with someone."

IX

DOWN THE WAYS OF CHANGE

Thereafter, I noticed, Rhoda kept the affairs of Ermott Jacob much to herself. If to be able to trace the lines on which any event has developed is to understand the event itself, I suppose I may say that I understand this event; yet to me it is now, and has ever been, amazing and inexplicable. It was not as though, like Andrea del Sarto's Lucrezia, she had in the past wished me to make my Art subserve profit. She had not. Indeed, she had been jealous to a fault of its purity and virginity. That is the amazing part of it.

Yet she had sunk her individuality, her proper personality,

in the process of her jealousy, and now it was emerging, occasioned by our cleavage.

Some time previously Ermott Jacob had had an offer from a firm of publishers to write a novel for them. It was one of those firms that are careful never to publish a book of permanent value, but, with that saving clause, catholic to a fault, especially where a book mixes a delicate blend of life as-it-should-be-lived, titular splendour and pornographic suggestion. Terms had been offered that the letter described as generous, but which were a disgrace to honesty or intelligence. So Ermott Jacob had gathered some of the tales that appeared under that name, and sent them elsewhere. They had not been accepted, but another suggestion had come for the writing of a novel. This we had jointly concocted, and Rhoda was now at its writing. Consequently what with my occupation with "Fairholt Evans" and Rhoda's labour at her novel ("The Gateway" was to be its title), and each of us somewhat jealous of the encroachments of the other's work, we never now seemed to arrive at that identity of outlook that had made the past years to us so splendid in their bravery and cheer.

With the publication of "Fairholt Evans" I thought a change would have come about, for, to my surprise, it was exceedingly well received, the very height of its ambition serving to win critics to its praise who, it was plain, did not altogether understand it. Indeed, there is no doubt a change would have come about had we not been afflicted by the terrible awkwardness of one another that afflicts the intimacy of marriage, that is, as it were, the outcome of that intimacy. The intimacy being assumed, so many things are taken for granted, which, if by some chance that intimacy be marred, demand mention for its resumption. Lovemaking in the brave, clean sense can never be dispensed with in marriage, which may seem a truism, but which, nevertheless, is more often than not forgotten.

Man is more frequent in such tendernesses than woman, and when a woman is constant in such overt signs of affection what an understanding may not be reached!

I am aware I am seeking to explain the fact between Rhoda and myself; in my general, I know, the particular peeps urgently. She was thrilled by the reception of "Fairholt

Evans." The tacit admission of its value even when a lance was couched at it, was my first admission to a secure rank, and it was plain to see how proud she was. I noticed also that for more than a week she forebore from "The Gateway." We even went out to dinner together, stinting ourselves nothing through a whole merry evening, to celebrate the fact. But neither of us said anything to the other of the matter between us: she spoke no spontaneous gladness or praise, and I asked for none. It was all assumed. Consequently there was no change. She went on her way and finished her novel, while I proceeded with my work and dreamed plans for future books.

I do not know what reception was hoped for "The Gateway." I know very well what reception it found. I opened my paper one morning, and saw a note on it that was a marvel of caustic condensation. Luckily the paper was up before my face, and so Rhoda could not see the sharp wince that passed over it. But I suppose something in my manner told her—or, it may be, she had, by our continual contact of soul with soul, drawn it out of me, as she was always drawing out my untold thoughts and giving them back to me—for she said, with an obvious further question behind the question of her words:

"Anything in the paper this morning?"

"No," I said carelessly, flinging it aside.

She said no more, but later in the day I noticed her scrutinising the paper closely, and for the remainder of that day she bore about a white face and silent, strained manner that pained me acutely. She had evidently been struck deeply. But we still said nothing. In our earlier days she had comforted me over my disappointments; now, in our later hour of accomplished intimacy, I said nothing to her in hers.

But more followed. Some were no more than curt dismissals, one or two in the more popular journals were enthusiastic over the very elements of popular appeal that no writer likes to think in his work, however designedly he had placed them there; but for the most part they were caustic or brutal. One was so particularly, and I noticed a tear shine on her cheek after reading it.

I crossed quickly over to her, and sat on the arm of her chair. "Poor old girl!" I said.

"Oh, Jack!" she said softly, and burst out crying.

I wonder if half the reviewers realise the pain they cause. If they spoke from a zeal for the high business of Art one could forgive them their strictures. But not more than one in ten of them has ever realised for the fractional space of a moment that Art may have a high business. They speak so because it is a reviewer's trade to be ill-tempered: a number of them because they themselves never have had a book published and cannot forgive those who have.

"My dear, what do these things matter?" I said, taking the paper from her hand, and dropping it on the floor. How cheap and futile my words sounded on my lips: for I had passed through the same thing and knew well that such things matter considerably. How different had been her brave comfort when I had undergone the same experience! But I was bound helplessly, for she had believed in my work, whereas I was ashamed of Ermott Jacob. I had a right to be, for I had chiefly originated that person.

She buried her face in my coat, and cried her fill. I was wild with tenderness, but my tongue was strangely tied.

"One song does not make a chorus, dear old girl," I said, stroking her hair.

"No, but it's what the whole chorus sings," she sobbed. Her completeness to the metaphor in her grief was typical of her.

"Poor old ladybird! Let's watch and see what the sales have to say."

It flashed upon me I was comforting her from without, not sympathising with her from within, and my faithlessness in that afflicted me acutely. Yet I was involved in the censure.

She was a quivering mass of nerves by now. The previous censures were having their day too.

"They shall admit my work is good," she cried. "They shall, they shall, or I'll——"

"But we rather expected this, dear, didn't we, when we first devised Ermott Jacob? It was only to make the money to live by."

"No, it never was," she interrupted fiercely, drawing away from me. "Only in some of the first stories, perhaps. 'The Gateway' was a good book. It's a book that ought to influence people. And it will, it will. I have only praised the right things in it; and because I have written it so as to reach a

larger number of readers, and not only a stupid elect few, a stuffy, priggish lot, is that any reason why it isn't just as good ? ”

X

AN EVENING AT MY UNCLE'S

I was soon amazed and disconcerted at receiving a letter from Aunt Mary asking us up to dinner. It was blandly and cordially couched, as though there never had been any estrangement : in fact, it was oddly couched, as though Rhoda and myself were habitual and well-beloved frequenters of the household, and as though Aunt Mary were a person whose only fault was a too spontaneous gush of emotion.

“ There's a quaint concoction for you,” I said, tossing the letter over to Rhoda.

“ I don't see that it interests us,” she remarked when she had read it.

“ I don't see that it does,” I said.

Yet it did not seem to me as though the matter could be quite so summarily dispelled, and, after a perplexed pause, I added :

“ We'll have to go, for all that, I suppose.”

“ Why ? ” Rhoda asked, and her voice was like her question, inasmuch as it cut clean across any hesitation.

“ Well, because there it is, and it can't be shuffled.”

“ Do you want to go ? ”

“ I ? If the lot of them were wiped out to-morrow there wouldn't be many tears I'd shed, and I shouldn't read the paragraph in the paper to the end either. But they're not going to be wiped out in a dispensation, and they have asked us to dinner.”

"We have managed very well without them so far, and I don't see why we should go tramping after them now you are making a name, and they come snuffing after it."

"Oh yes, I know the value of it. But the fact remains."

"I shouldn't take any notice of the letter."

"Nonsense! I've got to. You don't seem to recognise the position of affairs."

"I think you're very silly. I'm not going, anyhow."

"Look here, Rhoda, we've got to. You've got to, and so have I. One generally supposes it is women who uphold these puzzling obligations, but it is we soft-hearted men, 'pon my word. I'm dashed if I want to go. The whole crowd of them bore me, and when they don't bore me they anger me—which is healthier but more disconcerting. For all that, they can compel us, for some odd reason I don't understand; and there may be some decent people there. She speaks of some literary people, and the Jacob uncle knows some brilliancy, whom he seems to dazzle. I'll give him his dues, he's a bit of a genius in his way—and in his ways too, for he proceeds on divinations."

So it came about that we went. Neither of us wished to do so. We each expected to be wearied and irritated, while Rhoda, though she did not confess it in her manner, was also not a little nervous. Yet there was this curious obligation, that she admitted not less than I. Consequently we were inclined to be short with one another as we set out.

It was all a little puzzling, for both Uncle Jacob and Aunt Mary gushed over us as though we had ever been their dearest friends. There was scarcely even the assumption of an older generation in relative stratification.

"I am so glad you are able to come," said Aunt Mary in queenly acceptance of Rhoda's outstretched hand, while Jacob Mueler bore me off with:

"Ah, how are you, Jack? Well, my dear fellow, I am right glad to see you. Willie, this is the man. The genius of the family, I tell you. Sir Statham Willie has been reading your last book, Jack, my boy, and he's a great admirer of yours."

A tall, bearded man rose to meet me, and I rapidly took in a cultured and keen face as I stretched forth my hand in recognition of the introduction.

"Yes, I assure you, you are no stranger to me, Mr. Elthorne," he said pleasantly, in a quiet, easy voice.

I was not best pleased at all this, for Jacob Mueller's manner had been as full of gush as his voice had been noisy. Several people looked up at me interestedly, as I could see without glancing their way; and I sat beside Sir Statham hurriedly, in order to escape further attention.

While I bandied the usual ridiculous small-talk with him I took note of him, and judged him to be one of those men with a real, and a brave, taste for literature, but a taste founded somewhat on what I may call the Medicean, or Italian Renaissance, principle. That is to say, his taste in Art was quite genuine, there was really no affectation in it, yet it was curiously remote. In other days he would have made an excellent patron of Art; he could have given intellectual homage to the Artist, but would have required that the Artist should present his works to him as from a lower social caste. Similarly he would, I felt convinced, profess the warmest and most enthusiastic praise for a book on fire with revolutionary ardour, by a writer whose revolutionary ardour was the breathing reality of him, and in the next breath express the utmost horror of the least taint of possible revolution in a corrupt society. He would recite aloud, with a just sense of decorum, eloquent passages extolling the innate nobility of man, and continue to treat his servants, industrial and domestic, as though they were cattle.

He was, indeed, typical of the third generation of riches. The first generation, the generation that achieves the riches, is usually mentally brutal, and often physically brutal too; the second generation, mentally puppyish and physically dandiacal; the third generation, mentally dandiacal and physically refined. Thereafter they conform to the usual uninteresting type.

Yet he was, in his way, quite sincere. His love of literature was based on a considerable knowledge of it and an independent and resolute judgment of it. He had evidently read "Fairholt Evans" with some care. He spoke of it, and the things it treated of, with knowledge and authority. But I did not know the man, and I cannot talk of things that are more to me than life with a stranger, so I created a network of small-talk over it and let it pass at that.

I was not sorry when a familiar voice exclaimed in surprise :
"Hullo- Jack !"

It was Frank, with round eyes of amazement, and I returned his hail.

"Rhoda with you ?"

"She's somewhere about. I suppose Viola's with you ?"

He did not see the return shot and replied that she was.

"Ah, Sir Statham ! I am sorry. You well ? A famous man, my brother, these days."

"Indeed, and with justice, I may add."

"They keep on coming out, these books of his !"

"We need ideals these days, and that is why——"

Frank's manner was the last cry in graciousness, and I escaped as I saw myself substituted for the weather.

I found out Rhoda, who was sitting alone on a sofa. "Hullo, my dear," I said, "how are you getting on ? Or is it vulgar to ask that here ?"

"Oh, all right ! I've just been talking to a Lady Statham Willie."

"I've just been talked to by her husband."

"They seem to think a lot of your books." Rhoda was flushed with pleasure.

"I don't know that I'm flattered." I was, of course.

"I think they're the reason of our being here, if you ask me."

"Oh, very likely ! Hadn't thought of that."

"Rhoda, I want to introduce you to Mr. Jason," said Aunt Mary, sailing over to us.

As I watched the two of them stepping across the room I heard a voice greet me, and I turned to behold a lordly and languid cousin.

"Ah, Jack," said he, and as I shook hands with him I marvelled at the fluctuations of some people. The last I had seen of him was when he protested his eternal assistance to me in that very house, save for one or two fleeting sights of him at Frank's wedding. His patronage of me now was so supreme that I regarded him steadily in a wise silence.

"You're a very famous chap nowadays, aren't you ?"

"Not more so than you, though," I protested.

He cogitated over this for a minute and passed it.

"I say, I've got a jolly woman to introduce to you. Will

you come over? You've got to cart her in to dinner. You're a lucky man, you know."

She was indisputably jolly. So jolly that, at dinner, as we chased one mad subject after another, I did not notice that I had a sister-in-law sitting on the other side. Presently I became aware that she was regarding me—it was the proximity of a reproof of our jollity that first impinged on my consciousness—and I turned about on her.

"Oh, I am sorry," I explained. "I did not notice you so near. How are you?" I felt I ought to address her as Viola, but there are certain persons whose aspects seem to rebuke such familiarity. She had a queenly manner.

"You are having a very gay time, I notice."

"Oh rather, we are, aren't we? I really do not know your name, though."

"You can call me anything you like, so long as I know what to respond to. My real name is Mrs. Harrison."

"Oh yes. Mrs. Harrison—my sister-in-law, Mrs. Elthorne."

After they had swung a few civil refrains across me, Viola turned on me and declared:

"We are going to live at Brighton. But probably Frank has told you."

"No, I knew nothing. I hope you'll like it. It'll be a pull up and down for Frank, won't it?"

"One gets so tired of London. You must come down and stay with us. You shall have a special room for your writing. And do bring your wife with you."

Again I had to fall back on a wise silence. I marvelled at my own restraint. Rhoda, on any reckoning save that of a full-dress parade, was worth fifty of her.

So the ball of conversation fell to the floor between us, there being neither of us to hold it, and I turned about to claim my partner again for more riotous behaviour.

After the ladies had withdrawn, in the evil manner bequeathed to us from days of drunkenness, I found myself once more in the clutches of Sir Statham Willie.

"You slipped away from me before, I fear," he said with the easy grace he wore so well. "In case I do not have another chance may I suggest that Mrs. Elthorne and yourself come to tea with us, quite informally, some afternoon this week? We live in Georgian Square, number twenty-four."

We should be pleased ; if I may say so without offence, we should be honoured."

"It's very kind of you. We should be pleased to come."

"There are incidentally several points you mention in your book that I shall look forward to discussing over with you. To me that is one of the great fascinations of your book : it raises so strong and insistent a host of questions that lie near the centre of man's concern on earth. I am reading your other books."

The insistent note of a single voice holding forth to a company broke through the little ring of our conversation, and we looked about, to see Uncle Jacob declaring from his place at the head of the table with flushed face, eager eye and hand outstretched. He was criticising a recent exhibition of a new school of Continental painters. What he said was sound and acute ; he dealt, with equal acuteness and competency, with the spirit informing the work as with the technical craftsmanship that exhibited it. It was truly an excellent, searching examination ; it was Uncle Jacob at his best, and he flushed crimson with pleasure when, at his conclusion, Sir Statham leaned forward and said :

"Bravo, sir ! I agree with every word you say."

"An excellent man, your uncle," he continued turning to me. "In his way, a genius. I contend one of the few geniuses in England. An original, searching mind. Constructive too, in its tentative, eager way."

"Of his genius there can be not one doubt, it seems to me," I agreed.

"One hears curious things about him sometimes," he continued, catching the touch of reserve in my tone. "Different men proceed in different ways, I know. And I can understand the rapidity of your uncle's procedure leading him to actions on which it would be possible to put a dubious construction. Still, I will forgive a man of undoubted genius many things. You and he are very great friends, are you not ?"

"Hardly that," I said succinctly. Doubtless Jacob Mueler in the day of my esteem honestly thought we were.

"I understood you were," he replied, quietly skirting a difficult rock in the road.

Then I was rolled about the conversational rapids. First

Uncle Jacob joined us, and as I left the conversation to him, I was caught away in turn by two men for short interchanges of banality, passing so to Frank, who informed me of his Brighton decision, and gave me long and elaborate details of the causes that led to the decision (which I paid no heed to, because I was working out the exquisite gradations with which a peach passes from one cheek of carmine to another of delicate green) ; and so I was eddied into the drawing-room, where I sought out the vivacious Mrs. Harrison for security and enjoyment.

While I was talking to her I saw Viola cross the room and sit beside Rhoda with queenly majesty of grace. I knew my Rhoda perfectly, and right across the room I could catch the temper of what was proceeding. I could feel Rhoda with her quick, direct mind ringing round Viola, who sailed on majestically unconscious that she was being summed up by the other very much to her disadvantage. The infinite comedy of it across the room fell on me in wave on wave of emotion. Both were very courteous, so far as one could judge from their manner : indeed, Rhoda was the more courteous of the two. She, despite her sharper alertness, was the more subdued of the two, Viola being clearly somewhat overbearing. I could even picture myself lying on the bed that night laughing softly in keen enjoyment while Rhoda disrobed and gave me her opinion of her queenly and enforced relative.

"I have said that three times already, and I refuse to say it any more. Now I'm going to leave you."

I turned about to arrest Mrs. Harrison's anger, and explain the occasion of my rudeness.

"I'm watching those two ladies over there. Do you notice anything strange about them? I mean, do you feel the comedy of their cross-purpose, or rather cross-mental-relation, striking you in waves?"

"In a way I do, now you mention it. Oh yes, I do, quite distinctly ; it's a kind of comedy. One of them is your sister-in-law, isn't it?"

"And the other is my wife."

"Ah!"

"Have you ever thought of one of those Spanish galleons fighting an Elizabethan frigate? They can never grapple anywhere, can they? And each despises the other infinitely,

but with a different kind of contempt. Excuse me, but I must say I think it's excessively comic."

She laughed gently and musically beside me. "Of course I can't feel it like you do. I don't know your wife. But doesn't she just wish the majestic one consigned to warmth?"

"But the Spanish galleon can't feel that. She's too high above it. You see she sails on quite unperturbed. You wouldn't think that a person so scorned would be so calm about it."

"Yes; and you wouldn't think a person so looked down upon, and yet feeling so much keener and righter, could refrain from pulling the majestic nose."

"Alertness and heaviness, eh?"

"Speed and pomp."

"I suppose this is really very indiscreet."

"It's very delightful."

"Yes, those are frequently synonyms."

I said nothing about this to Rhoda going home that night, though I heard her contempt of Viola's condescension with some renewal of amusement. I mentioned only that Frank probably liked that kind of majesty. There was, in some way, a kind of commercial value attaching to it.

"Oh," she said, "and Lady Willie is very anxious that we should call on them. She wanted to call on us. But I didn't give her our address. I thought that their admiration of your work would probably not survive a sight of our small quarters."

"And Thingummy was urging the same thing on me. It's a kind of conspiracy."

"But we'll go."

"Oh rather: we'll go. We may as well see high life when we can, my dear."

A PERPLEXING DISCOVERY

We allowed a decorous time to elapse before we paid the promised visit to Georgian Square. I may well admit the snobbery implied in the delay. I also protest a degree of dignity in it. Yet these accursed social distinctions are bound in with the very texture of our thought, and it is much to be doubted if we will be rid of them without a momentous upheaval.

May had matured her comely graces, and the hint of a coming pomp was in the air. The houses of Georgian Square hung closely round the trees and bushes that were for them a favoured interval of Nature, as though, in a desert city, they would miss no aroma that floated upward from the hidden bosom of earth. The tall trees, from the crowning elm to the more pedestrian plane, as though wearied with the effort to maintain the semblance of life, segregated as they were from the mighty herds of their companions, wore a somewhat jaded aspect. It was not obvious. Few would have noticed it. The green of their leaves was yet tender, despite the coming of richness upon it, and it shimmered under a softly flowing wind like the rippling of a lake of waters. Yet the gaiety was not absolute, it was but relative. Beneath it, to the sensitive discernment, there was a sadness and heaviness entangled in their souls, as of an infinite loveliness, of a life rudely detached from the spacious places where the great ones of their kind ran wildly and free.

The smaller bushes blossomed gaily. Smaller souls, they could run in their little companies and scarcely miss the greater spaces. May-trees poured their red and snowy froth on to the pavements; laburnum dripped its yellow spume from drooping limbs; lilac stood erect in alert spires of wonderment; a vivid carpet of variegated hyacinth and tulip spread away to a central space of bright green, through strong iron rails that enclosed their merriment like a forbidden place of enchantments. But over them hung the great elms. The enclosing stucco houses, like a troop of soldiers on amazingly white hearthstone-stands, were an indignity to them. They could do nothing, but there was a majestic protest in their poise.

I presume I was in one of those moods of sudden sympathy that come upon some men, for the sight of that Square as we walked down into it silenced and awed me. It was something beyond all appearances, beneath all appearances. It was something as terrible as the slow tears of strong, silent men. It was something that appalled.

A feeling that, living in this city, I was involved in a conspiracy, despite myself, against terrible powers that waited patiently to be terribly avenged, afflicted me as I followed Rhoda up a wide stairway, the walls of which were hung with heavy paintings, good and bad, but all celebrated in their degree. It haunted me as Lady Willie came quickly across the drawing-room at the call of our names at the door.

"Oh, this is nice, to see you. We began to think you were never coming. I am expecting my husband in about half an hour. You will stay so long, won't you?"

There was no man in the room. There were, I noticed whimsically in my half-raptness, no independent young women—even in the most elastic sense of youth. The company was comprised of dowagers alone and dowagers with attached maidens. The result was a decidedly old-world appearance.

Then one of the dowagers, seeing me silent, and promptly concluding that I was ill at ease, sought to cheer me with a remark.

"It's nice to live in a square like this, so properly tended, and see the spring coming along, isn't it, don't you think?"

I suppose I must have been looking out of the heavily curtained windows, and that she imagined she had divined my mood with rare social tact. I made no effort to disillusion her. It was easier to let it slip by carelessly.

"Certainly," I said.

"And they keep the gardens in such choice condition. I have never seen such a display of flowers in a public place."

Being, in its prodigal power throwing itself with abandon into a richness of colour and fragrance, was a display for her. Well, it indisputably was a display.

"I wonder why people who can afford it live in the heart of a city when they need not," I said suddenly.

"Oh well, one must live in town, mustn't one?" She smiled graciously on me. "You live in town, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

She smiled again in quiet conviction. She clearly approved herself for having scored so neatly on me. It suddenly flashed upon me that if she, talking so with me, could see our small house and know our small income hardly earned, she would not be able to associate them with me or me with them. I, in that room, clearly seemed to belong to her own manner of life. My circumstances, just as clearly, belonged to those of a lower order—an order that demanded kindness and patronage, but not an order of association. The two things would have been incompatible to her. Between us two there was a great gulf fixed, and that gulf was her amazing ignorance.

It was impossible to resist a contempt of her, and it was Lady Willie who came to the relief of our diffident silence.

"Have you read any of Mr. Elthorne's books, Mrs. Ross?" she said, sitting beside us.

"No, I am afraid I have not. You see, I am kept so occupied with my League work."

Her manner made it perfectly clear that she neither knew my name nor the fact that it had ever been imprinted on the covers of a book. And it was equally obvious that she had now found a perfectly satisfactory explanation of my oddness.

I looked round in vain for someone with whom I could either seriously discuss earnest things or heartily play through romping things. Mrs. Ross would have found nothing a satisfactory explanation of me if I had suddenly asked her to play a game of marbles on the floor, any more than if I had been so far tactless as to give her a description of how the poor live, or how the poor pretend not to be poor under penalty of being poorer still. The very air of stiff civility and pretence was stifling.

I looked across at Rhoda, and saw her with a curiously flushed expression, half-perplexity, half-pleasure, held in conversation by a vivacious dowager and her attached maiden. She held a book in her hand which they were evidently discussing. It was plastered with a library label, but it looked wonderfully like "The Gateway."

Lady Statham Willie had vastly more depth than Mrs. Ross, and she enlivened the conversation till her husband

returned. She was a marked contrast to her husband. Somewhat under middle height, she had a stout, or rather wide, figure, with a broad, pleasant face. A kindly grace of humour dashed her manner and mental outlook, just enough, and refined just enough, not to make her socially indecorous. Hers was a direct and practical mind. It did not take much perception to see that she was the organiser of the household, husband included. His was the figure-head, and she arranged and managed things for him, devising it so that her support always placed him in advantageous lights. But it was she who handled the reins. She handled them capably. For twenty minutes she brought Mrs. Ross and myself to a common unity of interest in suggestions for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Sir Statham on his entry bore me triumphantly off to his library. All my books (even the Disraeli volume, which was out of print) faced me on one of the shelves, and in the cry that my soul set up I forbore being regaled on superb editions that evidently only subserved a delicate pleasure. These books meant no burning fire of inspiration to the man. They did not bring the god in him to sing out in a mighty pæan of triumph. They did not make him a king. They found him a baronet, and they left him a baronet : a baronet who had had, if rumour spoke truly, to pay rather more than the market price of that honour into his party's funds inasmuch as he would not undertake political service even to presiding at public meetings. They did not knock his head against the stars, nor did they set the stars like clusters in his soul. Therefore we really had no community of emotion in them, however much it might appear to be so, or however much we might simulate it. Yet his pleasure in them was quite unsullied. He had never dared the heights and so he never risked the depths. He remained only superbly secure on the sunlit slopes.

So when Lady Willie came to inform " these bookmen that such a thing as Time was passing, and that Mrs. Elthorne was waiting for her husband," his manner towards me made it evident that I was fast in his affection.

Outside, it seemed to me, Rhoda had a manner of suppressed excitement I could not understand ; and she was unforgiveably inattentive as I declared my anger that the splendid passions

of an artist should be made to subserve an appetite that toyed with them for idle pleasure. Then she cut me short with :

" Jack, is there time for us to get to ——" and she mentioned the firm of publishers responsible for " The Gateway."

" Oh, was that ' The Gateway ' I saw you talking about ? "

" Yes, yes, but can we manage it ? "

" Barely. We might though. But why this haste ? How odd to have found it there ! "

" It was marked ' fourth edition.' Oh, Jack, let us try ! " She could scarcely contain her excitement.

" Hullo ! We might venture a cab on that."

" Oh, do let us ! "

The way of a book is a strange thing. Time was when the reviews on it were a just symptom of its sales—an augury of them. Now it is no longer so. A new, hidden rule is in operation, that none may discover. After the bitter attacks on the book neither of us had paid much heed to it. I had almost said we had not given much thought to it, but the quivering excitement beside me in the cab made it patent that this was not so at least in her case. As the negotiations had been made through me she could not have made any enquiries save through me, and how she must have fretted at my indifference ! I put my arm about her in tacit apology of my unknown cruelty.

" Oh, Jack, if it is so ! "

" It must be so if it's marked so, though we don't know what they mean by editions."

" Don't you think this cab's going slowly ? Couldn't we take another ? "

" Better sit tight, old dear. We shall manage it."

Half an hour later we were walking through a crowded street, and we might have been its only pedestrians for all we knew to the contrary. " The Gateway " was in its sixth edition, the previous five having meant a total of nine thousand copies sold in England. Moreover it seemed as though, for some indiscoverable cause, a run had been started, for each week, it appeared, saw an increasing bulk of orders. The publishers had scarcely advertised it, but now they were about to inaugurate an extensive and elaborate campaign.

To our way of thinking we were rich. We were rich as we had never thought to have been. We were dazed with our richness. But we were not so dazed as to lose sight of the fact that the occasion demanded a regal and a costly dinner.

XII

A NEW SYSTEM

I have said that, beyond our dreams of possibility, we were rich, yet in that very form of statement it becomes apparent that it was not I who was rich, but Rhoda. The fact that, in the natural outcome of events, those riches were likely to be considerably increased, only made the thing more apparent.

I would have put it away on a shelf of my thought, but for one aspect of it that was not to be burked. It was due to me to put it away so. If marriage be a partnership of equals (and it is a serfdom else) then the man is as entitled to the good fortune of his wife as she, in the more habitual course, is to his. She may claim it, so should he. It is part of the joint contract. Nor, truly, did it avail for me to say that her manner of work was part of the indignity of life that it was part of my manner of work to combat. That might seem the essence of honour to me, but, from the point of view of our marriage, it might also be regarded as a personal fastidiousness. But there was an aspect of it that became imperative.

As desired, the agreement for "The Gateway" stood in my name. It had no right so to stand. Had I succeeded she would have received the proceeds at my hands. Seeing it was she who had succeeded I ought to receive the proceeds at her hands. That was but simple rectitude.

It came up urgently, moreover. The book had originally been offered to several houses in America, and as none of them had taken it up, and as none seemed likely to take it

up, I had refused to let any clause for American rights stand in the agreement. But now it was proposed to issue an American edition, and the terms on which it was proposed to do so, considering the lapse of copyright, were exceedingly generous to us. There was the question of other books to follow from a successful author.

It was my moment. When the agreement arrived, standing in my name, I took it to Rhoda.

"Here's that agreement, dear. Don't you think it ought to stand in your name?"

"Is it necessary?" she asked, as though she were fearful of the suggestion.

"Well, nothing's necessary. But it would be franker, wouldn't it?"

"Why?"

"It's not just that I should pillage your labours."

"Dear, you're not doing that. But if you think it would be better——"

"And at the same time it would be better to make over the original agreement to you. It ought never to have stood in my name."

She held herself arrested looking at me. She seemed as though she were afraid of herself. Then suddenly she came to my side.

"Jack, let them stand as they are, this one and the other. Don't argue, don't argue; I want it like that. I would much rather, really. You do it all."

I wondered afterwards at her pleading manner. It seemed to me that she must already have given the matter some thought. But, constrained by her, I continued and concluded the arrangements myself.

Yet I was not satisfied. The whole thing pleased me ill: partly, no doubt, because my name stood to a kind of compromise very undesirable to me, but also because it was frankly unfair and inequitable. So we drew out a new scheme of life, whereby she took her own cheque-book and drew on the funds that were hers directly for herself. We kept a common account, yet I was careful to note what was mine and what was hers, and never to go beyond my own earnings for my own needs. Even so I was irked, though I attempted resolutely to hold it under.

Nor, indeed, was Rhoda satisfied, so far as I could judge. The money was hers, and she used it freely. To me, bound as I was in the memory of days when hunger was known, when I was almost nurtured to the expectation of misfortune, so much so that each knock of the postman caused my heart to beat wildly, it seemed that she was impermissibly extravagant. But I could say nothing, and we grew accustomed, each of us, to living a life of separate thoughts, pleasures, and even ambitions.

We gave up our small house, and took a flat in Kensington, not very far from Ramsay. It was, Rhoda said, socially permissible to live in confined quarters in Kensington when it was invidious to have greater arm-play and purer air in the remoter suburbs. She took a housekeeper to herself, so as to leave herself free for her work. She began, not only to pay calls, but to expect calls, and to devise entertainments.

In all this I was a silent and reluctant liner at the rear of an energetic tug. I have not the reputation of lacking energy, but a great lethargy had come over me. I could not work, I could not dream my dreams. I could not force a direction for my life, though the manner of that direction was as clear to me as of old. I could have wept, many times, in the melancholy that came upon me. I became cynical in my attitude to things, for which Ramsay took me roundly to task. I had longed once to be able to read certain books that my unremitting labour forbade to me. Now I could not find the energy to do so. Life was like a twisted knot in my hand that I had lost the will to untie.

When, in the autumn, the proposal came for Ermott Jacob's new book, I passed the letter over to Rhoda, and suggested that it would be well if a literary agent were appointed to devise the details. I suggested one, whom she went to see. I heard no more of it, but I knew that an agreement had been signed by Rhoda in her own name.

XIII

TIM MAKES A REVELATION

No doubt I would have justified myself in the end adequately. In fact, I must have done so, for no one can deny the original impulsion of his life. Yet it has ever been a curious gratification to me to think that it was Tim who came to my rescue.

I still continued my usual work, such as reviewing and essays: inasmuch as I used no other money than my own earnings for my own personal expenditure it was necessary for me to do so. I actually improved my position in this regard, for we entertained men of influence at the select dinners Rhoda slowly began to organise, and this reacted with considerable benefit on my cash receipts. But the personal cry had gone out of my work, as I had always sought to make it permeate all my work. None noticed it, but I did, and it depressed me acutely. When Rhoda declared, as she never tired of declaring, that it was mere pigheadedness in me to continue such humdrum labour, I said nothing; I made no reference to the new note of demand which accompanied her complaints, but I clung to my routine work despite my listlessness. I clung to it though I grew yet more listless, for by the end of that year Rhoda had made the better part of four thousand pounds from "The Gateway" in England, and America was now beginning a tale of success. Success makes success: everybody will read a book that everybody else declares a success, so long as the sentiment please: but it merely made my petty journalism to seem a farcical business. And to this Tim came with his healing.

A wave of grey had passed over the flaming red of his close-cropped head: prematurely. I imagine, though I never knew his age. He was now assistant-manager at Messrs. Mueller, Ltd., and took the major part of the work from Mr. Tonson. The jackdaw permitted this the more easily since he was by this time bullied out of all power to retaliate on his inferiors. I had influenced Frank to get him this rise, seeing that Frank was an eminently successful man, and therefore, according to commercial standards, a man whose wishes were to be studied. Tim knew this, but he was a man, and therefore

did not throw the loose ends of his gratitude about the place.

Now that we were very successful, and lived in a choice Kensington flat, Tim was not so welcome a guest as heretofore. Rhoda was not very proud of this fact, but it remained. We had at least one flaming quarrel about it, but since Rhoda declared that Tim might live on the premises for all she cared, I could say nothing. That splendid offer took the sting from my angry protest. But Tim felt the atmosphere, and he stayed away. So I went out after him, and we used occasionally to dine in Soho, or meet at odd times at Ramsay's flat.

I had noticed a slow and unaccountable change coming over him for some time, that partly associated itself, I saw, with his visits to Ramsay's flat, but which was yet something further. I did not much trouble to discover, for I cared for him so greatly on the human side that I had not discussed intellectual matters with him. Some might have conceived this as intellectual loftiness, but Tim and I knew one another better than that. Yet our conversations were more permeated with intellectual concerns than had ever been possible formerly. He had read my books, and he had continued with a good deal of other reading, in which I had helped him as best I could. But there was an element in it I had known nothing of, and which sprang fiercely and surprisingly out upon me in what is to me a memorable conversation.

We were sitting at dinner in Soho, or, more accurately, we were sitting after dinner smoking quietly together. Suddenly he said :

" Given up writing on ' The Weekly,' s'pose, now ? "

" No. Why do you think that ? "

" Hadn't been able to fix you."

It was some time before the force of this came upon me. My work there was never signed. None of my weekly work anywhere was signed, save by a rare chance.

" So you manage to spot them then ? " I said.

" Oh, ay, I may say. Like your books, you know. Make you feel you've God's promise, one may say : ' Thoughts that wander through eternity,' sort of." He was very abashed about this quotation. " You know, swell you up in a proper kind of way. Make you think, and hold your head up too."

I have sometimes desired to think that a man is his own dependency in the world, and may dispense with friends. It is such remarks prove the contrary. The blood began to flow again in me. My soul awoke from its lethargy.

"Those you can drop on, you mean," I said with an effort at disparagement.

"That's why I can drop on 'em," he replied.

He was carefully, somewhat nervously, ramming his pipe with the stump of a lead-pencil as he spoke, and I began to realise that he was throwing out a line to my aid. I think there were tears in my eyes as I looked at him. I know that my spirit was awaking to splendour and a knowledge of power within me, rising up with its wisdom from eternity.

"I didn't know, old chap, you followed my doings so."

"Never been to my room, I may say. Have ye? "

"No, that's true." I spoke slowly, for it seemed to me very strange that this should be so.

"Ah! "

I thought upon it steadily. Then I rose up, and called for the account.

"Hullo! Going? Where going? "

"To your room."

"No, look here, I may say. Well, I'm not going."

"Nobody asked you to."

"The Brownie won't let you in."

"Won't she? Not if I make up my mind? "

"You won't find the Brownie tidy to shift. You'd rather push about lead slag, I may say."

"That's a good thing to know beforehand, anyhow. I'm a bit stiff in the joints for dodging on stairs, though!—Tim! "

"Hullo! "

"Get up! "

Our conversation on the way to Shepherd's Bush was a suspended animation. We talked, intermittently, on cursory topics: it was as though it were understood that the more considerable matter was to be resumed, where it was suspended, when we won to our goal. This was over the surface of things: beneath the surface, independent of the cursory words we spoke, and yet oddly linked with them, a rich spiritual interchange was passing, as a result of which my soul was thriving,

and I was winning my way back to those feelings of power that give a man his quality in the world.

When we entered his room there was immediate silence between us, for I saw at once what he meant. There was a curious disorder about his room. A large, leather-covered easy-chair was drawn before a gas-stove, and there was an indescribable appearance about it that gave me at once to know that it had passed from his father to his mother, and from his mother to himself, being to him, therefore, beyond all price and reckoning, valuable. But it was to a bookcase in a corner that I at once went.

There is a knowledge beyond all phrasing and conveyance of words, instant and intuitive, and as I looked on that bookcase I saw something that touched me profoundly, yet distressed, and even pained, me. My own collection of books was as representative and varied as could well be in its compass; yet though a man may make all things subserve his Art there are things that are himself as other things are not, and as I looked on those books I saw the perfect reflex of my mind. I could even vaguely imagine possible conversations with him, or with Mr. Ramsay in his presence, in the juxtapositions of certain books with certain other books, conversations that I had no memory of, but which seemed all too clearly indicated.

"I say, Tim," I called to him.

"What's say?"

"Do you mind my saying straight out?"

"You can fire on, I may say."

"Don't you think you should have struck out and found your own imprint? A man's only a help to another while he finds himself, not a model—oh, good God, not a model!"

"Piff!"

"Nor is he. My thing, I know, is right, absolutely and magnificently right, or I wouldn't be after it. I'd die for it with a shout, if need were. But not its imprint on me. It imprints differently on different stuffs."

"Oh rather, so I should say. What am I but what you've made me, you and your friend Ramsay? Wouldn't I be grubbing all day, and loafing when I wasn't grubbing, and sleeping when I wasn't grubbing or loafing, if you hadn't

come flaming about me, making me mad with you, I was so sick with myself. Oh yes! Oh I may say! Different stuffs, old Jack! I know someone who hadn't got a bit of stuff at all. And that wasn't you, I needn't be saying."

"Nonsense, of course you had; more so, believe me, than many I know. And, in any case, to put it frankly, it looks too much like modelling on me, and I don't like to think that."

"Piff!"

"Believe me, I don't. I don't think I have ever felt so uncomfortable in my life. Each man must find himself, and I can only help."

There was a long spell of silence between us. I stood and surveyed his bookshelf, humbled and dismayed, while he lit his stove, then filled and lit his pipe. It was not until the opening heavy clouds of smoke had faded away, and he drew steadily and more comfortably, that he spoke again. Then he spoke slowly and with laboured earnestness.

"You won't shake me, I may say. Oh no! I don't know much about these things: not like you do." He paid no heed to the deprecating hand that I, in every earnestness, threw out, but continued as deliberately: "But I know this, it's no copy, as I should know, but another kind of finding. You go straight on, I don't; I go round and round. What's say then? I've got to go round and round you while you keep going straight on. See? You've made a big difference to me. I've told no one, but you have. You've made a man of me. I think, feel, be. Oh, I am, that's it. And you've got to go on and help me out, man."

I think we probably should have prayed together then. Possibly we did, for there was a long silence between us.

There was no moment in which there was not a spiritual interchange between us. There was no moment in which there was not an entirely manly interchange between us. When I left there was only a firm, steady handshake.

I walked the better part of the way home, for I was alone with thoughts that were indescribable. I longed for great hills, and the quiet, undulating rhythms of earth throbbing softly about me in the darkness, while I walked with my thoughts. But the clash and clangour of intermittent traffic

broke harshly on my ear, and marred the sanctity. Yet I had a vision of things, while the houses doffed their lights slowly one by one, and relapsed into darkness, that were very wonderful and very humbling.

XIV

" THE CRUCIFIX "

For some time prior to our sudden fortune, and our elevation to the ways of minor society obligations, I had been making notes for another study, yet more ambitious (for a man must go onward) to follow " Fairholt Evans." I had determined to entitle it " The Robes of Wisdom." It had been my wish to hold myself freer of my created character, and to break away into a rhapsodical eloquence that should overcome the limitations that logical phrases have for the conveyance of the things prior and subsequent to the somewhat pert, however wonderful, device of words. Yet to do this would need very careful and orderly arrangement. For example, I did not know whether to put the eloquence into the lips of my creation, or boldly to take it up myself. I had worked hard in my thought at it, till the compromise our success meant, with its attendant departure into an artificial way of living, made the whole scheme fall ineffectually from my hands.

The morning following my conversation with Tim I found out my notes and lived the day with them. I lived the week with them. Rhoda, I noticed dimly, devised things so that I should not be interrupted, and that nothing should jar upon me. In the dear way she could so well pursue, she showed in a hundred little ways her joy that I had resumed what was life to me. I remembered she had been vaguely distressed at my lassitude for some time, and had endeavoured to surround

me with more luxuries for my better peace, whereas it was the very presence of the luxuries, seeing whence and by what compromise they came, that had chiefly induced the lassitude.

So we grew again to a kindlier understanding—so far as the eternal presence of a housekeeper and two servants would allow. Inasmuch as she gave up demurring at my absolute refusal to use her moneys for my private expenditure, very little actual difference of opinion came up in our speech together. I know my inconsistency, I do not seek to disguise it. I was living on her moneys, and so there would have been no difference in the acceptance of a further obligation. But a man's wayward and illogical actions are not all the folly they seem. Such actions usually have a symbolic value to him, the destruction of which symbol is the destruction of all that it means to him, good or bad.

Yet there was another barrier between us, though this had gone; one that never broke into our speech; and whose guarded absence from our speech was the sign of its existence. She never referred to my work, she never asked to see it, even as I was never suffered to, nor indeed desired to, know how she progressed with hers. Nay, I knew she would probably now not read my book when it came out. I may have been altogether wrong in my thought, but I had it powerfully. If she read it she would do so cased about with a spirit of guardedness, lest it broke in upon, and marred, the thing she herself wished to do.

I am aware that this, put down crudely so, cannot but make me appear very undesirably an egotist, nor will it condone that imputation to say that I was willing to suffer for the ideals I held. Yet it is only fair to say that these were indeed ideals for which I stood—ideals that the conscience of men attest even against their own doings. Rhoda's very fear was not so much a fear of something without her, as of its appeal to something within her. The thing that stood between us was something as proper to her as to myself, only she was faithless to it.

Yet though we did not remove it from betwixt us, we drew to each other very wondrously over it. Timidly, tentatively, we put our hands to touch one another over it. We were very shy of one another, and the intercepting obstruction made us

yet more shy. We began to see more of one another. We took our courses less in independence of one another than had been the case for over a year. I was much engrossed in my new book ; I had begun to write it now, and I lived with it always ; there was no moment of my day or night when I might not be said to have been at work on it. If I was not writing it I was reading for it, and when I was not writing or reading I was thinking upon it. My very dressing and undressing began to be even more than usually intermittent and absent-minded proceedings. Consequently we had not much time together. Yet when we had we went out together. We soon resumed our old habit, relinquished this many a year, of walking the streets together, my arm in hers or hers in mine, quietly watching the ways and faces of people and noticing the well-nigh intolerable drabness, and sameness, and dully automatic repetition, of their conversation. I wonder that did not have its effect upon her. It is the Ermott Jacobs on the one hand, and the hideous, insulting slavery imposed by Industrialism and Commerce on the other, that have produced monstrous cities full of men and women more like the dull, uncontemplative cattle than their own godlike prototypes. Their work is not work but degrading labour ; their recreation is not re-creation but sentimental or vicious excitement.

Yet we went about so, and the fact that the obstruction between us caused us never to lose our shyness, made our interchanges exquisitely tender. To this hour there is an incommensurable fragrance about those walks of ours.

Then, suddenly, the ruin came to it all. The obstruction between us was thrown up mountain-high, and the fact that Tim's words had stung me into zest again made its presence the more fiercely intolerable.

I had ceased work late one afternoon, and, as Rhoda was out paying some or other call, I had gone for an hour's walk at top speed. It was only so I could escape the revolutions of my thought, and I always adopted it when I wished to approach what I had to do from a newer point of view.

When I returned I found a parcel had arrived for Rhoda. As it bore the name of her publisher I guessed its contents. I did not know the book was to be published so soon. It was a sign of how little either of us knew of the other's dearest

tillage. With a presentiment of evil I cut the parcel open and bore off a copy to my study.

I read quickly and cursorily, with a sickening heart. And when Rhoda opened the door and entered I had well-nigh finished it. I could see instantly in her face that she had come to verify what the opened parcel suggested. Her eyes had gone instantly to the book in my hand. Her voice was nervous and agitated, a little defiant, too, when she spoke.

"I'm late," she said.

I said nothing, but drew into myself. Her sudden appearance made my whole soul shrink away.

She drew off her gloves with quick, nervous actions. Her manner was intensely business-like and unsympathetic.

"We shall have to hurry," she said.

"Hurry?"

"Yes, there are those people coming to dinner."

"Oh, confound ! I was looking forward to a good evening's work."

"There'll not be much time for you to dress, Mrs. Elthorne : you've not forgotten the dinner," said a level voice at the door. It was the housekeeper.

"No, I'm coming now. Half an hour, Jack."

The better part of that half an hour was spent by me standing in the middle of that room gazing at a book lying on my chair bound in mauve and with the figured gilt inscription, "The Crucifix." The dinner, I divined, was to celebrate its advent. Many thoughts fought in me, but distaste at the coming dinner predominated. Then I suddenly remembered that Ramsay had been one of the guests. That seemed particularly ironical, but it eased me somewhat.

XV

THE DINNER

By a careful secretion of superfluous furniture it had been made possible to seat ten at dinner with not too much discomfort. The Statham Willies, Miss Fortescue, an indefatigable writer of romances, a sleek parson and his wife, by name Sowerby-Smythe, Gregory Duncan, an under-secretarial person and hanger-on of Cabinets, and his wife, and Ramsay, comprised our guests. If Sir Statham Willie be called a reader of my books and so a very good friend of mine, then he and Ramsay constituted my share of guests at the solemn board. The rest belonged to Rhoda. I had pressed feebly for the inclusion of Mrs. Harrison, the gay widow, but I had been told that she would indisputably upset the equilibrium of graceful conversation. Strangely enough, that had been the very reason why I had wished her included.

Miss Fortescue and Rhoda had become considerable friends by reason of the former's pronounced admiration of "The Gateway." The response naturally was that Rhoda should become an admirer of certain very popular romances that had been well infused in a decoction of religious sentimentalism. Rhoda's response, I knew, was less unreserved than Miss Fortescue was led to believe, yet what one may call the Fortescue trail had very obviously run over "The Crucifix," for all that Rhoda was a daintier, less adjectival and emphatic, writer. Rhoda flitted from twig to twig in gentler, more aerial fashion, like a wren; Miss Fortescue went shrieking through the brushwood like a startled blackbird. The sleek Sowerby-Smythe, with a voice as though he were perpetually seeking to disguise the fact that he had his mouth full, had once preached a sermon on a novel of Miss Fortescue's dealing with the sanctity of something or other. How he ever managed to get through a sermon without someone throwing a hymn-book at him through sheer exasperation at the monotony of his voice, I do not know; but the fact remains on record. Those that go to churches in fine raiment must be schooled to a wondrous patience. At any rate, here was the cause of Sowerby-Smythe's inclusion, and also of

Rhoda's recent, though intermittent, visits northward to his church.

Gregory Duncan was a wit suppressed by a memory of official pretension. To see, and speak with, his wife was to revere and esteem her. If a tragedy be the baffling of worth by the imposition of a worthless convention, then both she and he were tragedies.

I insisted, contrary to all plans, on bearing Mrs. Duncan in to dinner, and I had the great joy of seeing Ramsay delivered over to Miss Fortescue. I rallied him on the fact that Kensington did not agree with him, and as only Rhoda and he saw my drift, it afforded me infinite satisfaction to see the topic of Kensington salubrity float about the table as the opener of amenities.

Sir Statham, even, sang it to Rhoda, who listened and was courteous as only a woman can be, caught in social meshes. Only I left it alone.

"What shall we talk about?" I said to Mrs. Duncan.

"Anything you wish," she replied, looking up simply and engagingly at me. Evidently she was prime for no conversational flights.

"It's you must decree."

"My husband has been reading your book."

"Ah! You haven't!"

"No, I'm ashamed to confess."

"Why not be proud to confess?"

"I'm afraid that's very like mock modesty."

"It's part of the convention."

"Are you very conventional, then?"

"I pledged allegiance to your lead."

"Was I conventional?"

"You started to talk about my book."

A period seemed to sound at that, and she gave it its full value before continuing.

"Are you interested in the Infirmary Bill?"

"Politics are another convention, I suggest."

"Oh no, no! They are the working out of ideals." There was manifest sincerity in the challenging ring of her voice. Faces of spiritual fragrance, such as hers, always betoken sincerity and purity, though often joined with a pathetic simplicity.

"You infer my book is not?"

"No, of course not! I was foolish to say that." She seemed pained at the suggestion.

"Indeed, I knew it. I only jested. What ideals do you think politics are concerned with?"

"I meant, our side,"

"I meant, either side."

"Well, Christian civilisation, and its working out in practice."

"Ah! I fear if Christ endured modern civilisation, and its cynic conspirators, the politicians, chiefly, there would be some more business done with a whip of cords."

"Do you think so? Oh dear!"

"Don't you? Compare Him, and the life He led, the way He thought, with this putrescent thing we call civilisation! Isn't the contrast its own revelation?"

"Do you read Meredith?"

"Dear Meredith! He was a man. You mean, I suppose, the first condition of sanity to believe that our civilisation is founded on common sense?"

"Yes, but I couldn't have remembered it, you know."

"But remember what Meredith reflected. Nineteenth-century negation. Pseudo-science, pseudo-philosophy: and consequently an abject acceptance of things as they are just because they are a bit further forward in time than things of the past. Conceive the intellectual cowardice of it—though, heaven knows, Meredith was no coward, rather the reverse. No, no; I believe in diviner origins and destinies. I believe that

'Our towns are copied fragments from our breast;
And all man's Babylons strive but to impart
The grandeur of his Babylonian heart.'

And when we copy wrong, through commercial avarice or official cowardice, there remains only to smash it all up and begin again, for the bad can only get worse on the law of its own being."

"Mr. Elthorne! But who's to do the smashing?"

"It's certain those who have the spoils from the wrong copy won't."

"It's simply terrible."

"Fire is always terrible, but it purifies."

Sitting beside me I could see her three-quarter face as she looked across the table with wide, wondering eyes fixed on space. I was afraid of the look in them. There is something that can be terrible about the Fra-Angelico saint once the fire lights in the soul. I bent the conversation back again.

"We must, you see, stick to the conventional," I said.

"Oh! Why?"

"Otherwise we find ourselves in middle ocean, with a storm brewing over our heads! And it is, by common consent, boorish and unrefined to be earnest at meals. I beg, most devoutly, your pardon."

"Are you talking politics?" Mrs. Sowerby-Smythe interposed from the right, with that added graciousness in her smile that parsons' wives are expected to show officials and their wives.

All the evening, both when the ladies had withdrawn, and when we were in the drawing-room, I endeavoured to get hold of Ramsay, but I was unable to do so. I would have taken him off to my study could I have done so, and risked the implied social neglect. But Sir Statham baulked me first, and then Duncan laid hold on me for a talk on some recent poems. I could only manage to whisper to him to be in no haste to go when the guests began to show their curiously unanimous desire to depart.

Presently all were gone save Miss Fortescue. Then I took occasion to say:

"I'll stroll along with you if you're going, Ramsay."

I felt, suddenly and irresistibly, a flame of opposition from Rhoda break round me as I stood up to put my suggestion into effect. I was even daunted by it, afraid by reason of it. Yet I held to my resolve.

It was a cold evening in late spring, the earthy smell of which was in the air even among the houses as we went. The stars shone in between scurrying clouds driven by a wind from the east. The pavements were still damp with the shower that had emptied and thinned their fleeting wisps.

"What do you think of the Fortescue?" I asked.

"She's an awkward woman to have on your own side. One would infinitely rather have her for foe. She's the sort that does the most damage to the side she's on."

We walked on in silence, breathing the freshened air with wide nostrils. How the hills must have been on such a night ! I was thirsty for them.

"We were celebrating something to-night, weren't we ? " he asked in his quiet, level tone. "Mrs. Elthorne's birthday, or your wedding-day ? "

"No, 'The Crucifix.' "

He drew his brow down in thought. Then his face lightened with recollection. "Oh ; is it good ? "

"My friend, we know one another too well to skate civilly on thin ice."

"I'm sorry," he said.

We walked on again in silence.

"Namby-pamby, slippy-sloppy, erotico-religious sentimentalism. Oh, Ramsay, I can't tell you how this has hit me. All we artists have our petty jealousies, I suppose, but heaven is my witness, I am clean in this. If Rhoda would only do the clean, upright, spiritually athletic thing, oh, I'd give anything for it, I would indeed. But this is the kind of wish-wash that your peevish dowagers dote on, and silly adolescent girls, thwarted of the outcome of their sex, gaping on some curate's eyes. The kind of stuff that Sowerby-Smythe will yawp his melancholy syllables over on a Sunday morning, and then be drawn in a sumptuous car by languid women to a decorous lunch, while men are starving, and women too, on every hand, and having the god in them whipped out by squalor and ignominy. And she's better than that, my Rhoda is, Ramsay, old man. Oh, such mountains higher ! Only, the shriek of popularity's in her ear ; absolutely, absolutely ; it's too deep-grained now to erase. 'The Crucifix' is enough to prove that, especially if it sells. Old man, I never wish to spend another two hours such as I had this afternoon reading it. And from so clean, and so brave, a spirit—so plucky and unflinching a fighter ! "

"Maybe not absolutely, though ! "

"Who knows ? But nothing spoils like success, especially if it be the success of a wrong thing."

"I'm afraid that's true enough."

"Well, I must go. She's waiting now to talk to me about it."

Not till I had spoken the words did I realise the knowledge

that had so unostentatiously fallen on me. As I stood with hand outstretched, under the stars that shone palely behind a hurrying gauze of cloud, in a night of dark and silent houses, I could see Rhoda sitting before the fire, gazing on it, waiting for me. I knew her thought, I realised her wish. Like a tumult of darkly hurrying figures across an obscure landscape a surge of thoughts, of images rather, had fled across my mind, leaving this one picture surely on my brain. It had fled after me, and had found, and caught, me.

"You won't forget," said Ramsay, as his hand came into mine, "more things are lost by a failure in kindness than the world dreams of, as a poet did not say."

"Yes, I see that."

"Good!"

A great depression of spirits was on me as I walked back through the night. And yet, curiously mixed with it, there was an exaltation of spirit. It was as though that portion of me that strode steadily beneath the black houses outlined against the indigo sky, back to the interview with Rhoda—as though that were depressed, while somewhere else a portion of my being trod on rolling hills, sentient and vast beneath a solemn night, snuffing the rich, sweet smell of my mother Earth, beaten upon by the winds that curled over her, bathing in the undulating waves of the actual rhythms of Being that were abroad in power.

Suddenly I became aware of someone running after me with a long, easy movement. I turned about, and presently saw that it was Ramsay returning.

"Forgotten anything?" I asked.

"No. Only I want you to know of my faith in you and your work, of my admiration for it. It struck me you needed that. The best of us slip without a song of cheer by our side. You have done splendidly so far; don't slip now. That is the obverse to what I said about kindness. They are both, oh, so necessary."

"God help me, but you're a good friend, Ramsay."

"Well, good-night again!"

"I say!"

He turned expectantly.

"You run well."

"It's easier that way, and splendid exercise. You should run home."

"Not in streets, old man. Over swelling hills—oh!"

XVI

AFTER THE DINNER

When I entered the drawing-room Rhoda was sitting much as I had imagined her, but she was reading. A rapid glance showed me that she was reading "The Crucifix," turning over the leaves and reading here and there in that first handle of a new book that is one of the joys of an author's life. I divined quickly that the book she held was the very copy I had borne away to my study, and that she had taken it thence. Her first words proved me right.

"I wish, Jack," she said, "you would not open my parcels."

Her voice was modulated to a smooth asperity that told me her sentence had been carefully weighed.

At first I took no notice of her words.

"You open my letters, anyhow, when you feel so disposed," I then said.

"Well, then, I'll never do so again," she said, closing the book, and throwing it beside her on the couch.

I lit a cigarette. Pipes, these days, had been ruled out of order in the drawing-room, as unbecoming. A stinging phrase had been on my lips, for her action had been petulance itself. But I changed my mind.

"I don't see that it's necessary to take it that way. We have never yet stood on ceremony with each other; why should we now?"

She was silent for some time at this. She was evidently

thinking fiercely, and I so well caught the development of her thought that her next words hit me shrewdly.

"What was it you wanted to talk to Ramsay about?"

"I did not go to talk with him. I wished to be with him."

"That seems rather an easy way of evading my question."

Her words, and the asperity with which they were delivered, nettled me considerably, and I had again to curb the irritable fiends that began to run on my blood. The distinction I had made was a real one, as well she knew, despite the fact that it offered her a manifest opportunity to display an effective wit.

"I can only repeat what I said, Rhoda. It very accurately defined my feelings. Besides," I threw out after a while, not desiring to be pushed to a continual defence, "you had the great Fortescue with you."

She flushed quickly as she replied in anger: "You always jeer at her."

"Excuse me," I broke in, "I never jeer at her. I hate her work, and I also happen to dislike her person. But you like her, and I'm not grumbling. I went out with my friend, while you remained with yours, whom I dislike. It seems to me perfectly simple."

What cowards we are! It was quite clear in my mind that the issue between us (though I scarcely knew what that issue was) would have to be fought, yet here I was seeking to ride it off and render it impossible. I began, indeed, to imagine that I had done so with fair success, but I did not allow for the fact that women are not harassed by the cowardice that afflicts men. Rhoda swept all impediments aside and flew straight for her mark.

"You know very well you went to talk with Ramsay because you had been reading my book." She had risen as she spoke, and stood facing me as I lounged against the mantelpiece. The firelight on her face made her seem thinner, I thought, an appearance that was emphasised by the richly brocaded and exceedingly expensive gown she wore. Yet in many ways she seemed even younger than on that first day of our meeting, when I had watched her furtively in Giorgio's restaurant, while she pretended she was not aware of it. In fact, she was younger. Each sex keeps the other young.

Intent on her person as she stood before me, I had not paid close heed to what she had been saying. I pulled on my attention and heard her again.

"You may even not have mentioned it."

"Mentioned what?" I asked.

"My book. What else am I talking about?"

"Well, go on!"

"But it was there all the time. You are never openly disloyal—that I will admit—but in fact you are, and it comes to the same thing. And what does it amount to? A petty, stupid jealousy because I have written a successful book and you have not. That's all."

I knew she did not think her words true, her very tone of excess implied so much, but I was so fiercely cut by them that my whole mind towered up in anger of resentment.

"If you ever spoke a deliberate falsehood in your life you spoke one then. At the best it's a falsehood, and at the worst it's a much shorter, directer, and less pleasant word, for if I have a jealousy (as heaven knows I may have) it's a jealousy for my art, which I consider a kind of priestly thing in the highest sense, and not truly for myself, who am the agent for it. You know that, and you shared in my feelings once. And now you fling this jibe at me! I have no words to say how utterly you are false to the best in us both."

She seemed shamed by my outbreak, but women, even less than men, do not easily relinquish an assumed position.

"My dear boy, you write for a mutual back-scratching society," she said.

It was a petty stab at the best, I know: it showed her, moreover, in her recently acquired social facilities. Yet by that very fact it wounded me most, for it most decisively emphasised our remoteness from one another. I turned away from her, for I was acutely distressed.

"What an epilogue to our fight together! You jibe at my comparative failure!—or deeper failure, for that matter, for I don't doubt that the back-scratching, as you elegantly put it, such as it is, will in due course fall out of favour."

"Why do you scoff at popularity?"

"I don't scoff at popularity. I want it. How I want it! I want 'joy in widest commonalty spread,' in that fine phrase of Wordsworth's. But I do not want sloppy religiosity lapped

up by the herd, depraving them so that they cannot know, and do not want, the deeper, more wholesome, thing."

I halted, for Rhoda had winced. I shrank from wounding her, for, heaven knows, to see her suffer, even at some slight practical joke of mine, filled me with tenderness. So I endeavoured to turn the immediate application away.

"Take the Fortescue's last book! I can't believe you like it."

"It stands for the things you say you stand for," she said.

"Yes, but how differently. Or put me out of it! Take it in some other field. Because Beethoven is filled as full as could be with tunefulness and mightiest harmony, would you therefore say that the latest sentimental serenade for the suburban elect stands with him against the hosts of arbitrary intellectual symbolism and cacophony? Or because the very latest melodrama works on the emotions even as 'King Lear' does, that therefore they stand together against actualism and intellectualism? Oh, my Lord, what a philosophy!"

"I don't think you are at all fair."

"Why," I turned on her, "the minds of men being for ever slothful—and that's the stupendous factor always neglected in idealistic calculations—the cheap must frustrate the great from its kingdom, far more than the adversary may."

While I had been speaking she had been walking up and down the room with an easy panther-like movement that had dimly surprised me, for her usual gait was eager and alert. It was the effect of queenly gowns, I suppose. It at any rate made our conflict less of a bicker than it otherwise might have been; it was driven beneath a more decorous appearance. She spoke to the same note.

"Would you say my book was the same as Ella's? No difference between them?"

"In style all the difference on the earth. If you will allow me to say so, there are pages in this book where the delicacy of your style makes one blind almost to the sentimental medium in which it works." She halted and flushed with pleasure as I spoke. "But it will sell worse in consequence. But the medium, the material, Rhoda! I don't wish to pain you, but I am bound to say it will rot the fibres of great spiritual being at the core. It will not ennoble; it will deprave in the worst sense."

"Writing for a purpose isn't Art."

"Nonsense! All great artists work for a purpose; they are all, in the highest sense, teachers; it is only the idlers who annul the high purpose. Besides," I added, "you are now contradicting yourself of five minutes ago."

She was faced by her contradiction and had no exit. As the moments passed and she had no reply I could see she was determining to cut her way through the mesh. She did so.

"Oh!" she said impatiently, throwing off the gauze tissue she had draped about her shoulders, "all this place is built on it, and you are very well content to live in it."

It was a blow deadly in its accuracy. Moreover, this was the second occasion of the selfsame stroke. As I stood there everything seemed to take new values before my eyes. She had seated herself on the sofa again and was once more fingering the book. Her attitude conveyed to me a sense of apology due to me for her stroke, but she was infinitely too proud to bend to it, while I would not anticipate it. We must have remained so, in strained silence, for the better portion of an hour, for the clock struck half-past one before she spoke again.

"Are you coming to bed?" she said then, and there seemed, to my ear, something in her voice bidding me take her words as a proffered overture.

But I said nothing. To be frank I dared not trust my tongue to speech.

"Well, you need not take it too seriously," she said again.

Still I said nothing. My nails, behind my back, were dug into my palms in the effort to restrain a very sailing tempest of tears. My emotions were strained past bearing.

"Oh, well," she said, and trod out, with her head high, and her mood unrepentant.

I seemed to be numbed. Presently I went over to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, looked out on to the night. The gauzy clouds and stars were still as though dark beings in the spaces of the heavens were catching bright jewels in pale phosphorescent nets, flinging them away and catching them again. The winds were still singing in the tops of the trees as they bent them suddenly over in fierce gusts. Over

across the road a street lamp was reflected in the wet cape of a constable asleep against a post.

In the room itself I noticed the fire low in the grate, and I heard the slow creak of its outer embers. I noticed the chairs, too, arranged comically in couples round the room, as though invisible spirits sat and held colloquies in them. I noticed everything acutely, even the curiously just assortment of colours in the flowers that decked the room, betraying Rhoda's sense of combination and balance. But I did not reflect : the busy fret-workings of thought were dead in me. I was so numbed—disastrously, unaccountably numbed—that I seemed only to live in my perceptions, which were abnormally acute. They were even highly metaphorical and pictorial : fantastical even, for as I turned to the room again from my sight into the street the trees were swaying to and fro in my mind like many-fingered witches bending in strange incantations.

Then, as I slowly rose out of my trance, as a great bird might slowly rise from the waters of an enchanted lake, I realised that the hour was well after three. So I took a couple of great-coats into my study, locked the door, and slept heavily in my chair, without a thought or dream till late the next day.

XVII

I MEET AN OLD FRIEND

Marital troubles do not often greatly divert the habitual domestic economy. One meets at meals, if not otherwise ; the customary amenities of conversation are exchanged, if not spontaneously, at least before onlookers ; and so, generally, with no manifest overture or admission of apology due from either side, the stream of a warmer feeling begins to trickle through and to swell apace, till it would seem as though all

memory, instinctive or reflective, had passed to a sometime beating of the drum.

Tragedies, however, are things of the spirit, not of the habit of life. After a few days (chiefly induced by the continual presence of our housekeeper) scarcely anyone would have surmised that there was anything amiss between Rhoda and myself; nevertheless the fact remained that my whole life was at a standstill. I had, with some strange forebodings, taken up my work again, but it had fallen uselessly from my hands. Not lightly turned aside from a task I set myself, I had persisted with its execution, but with disastrous results. I turn down "The Robes of Wisdom" now, and I can discover at once certain passages in it, too firmly embedded in its execution to be altered or excised, that display quite clearly the stubborn prosecution of what I wished to do rather than the full-hearted expression of my vision, such as it may be. For it was as though a spirit flowed into my study, as I sat at work, and firmly took my pen out of my hand. An atmosphere possessed the place that was hostile to my vision, to which my vision in turn was hostile. The fact that I was convicted in my own mind of being insincere and a fraud, was weighty enough, but this atmosphere seemed a deeper, altogether more penetrating, thing. It was a thing I could not gainsay and be the man I was, or wished to be.

Moreover, as I sat at my desk then, the recognition of other things came on me. With my page of MS. before me, and the pen lying idly beside it, my mind became preoccupied with strange images that floated before it. For some days I was too preoccupied with them definitely to take knowledge of them. It was as though I lived with them in some other world than this, knowing them too intimately to be doubtful of them, but without bringing them clearly before the recognition of the Self that had its major residence in this world of sense and sight. Then I awoke out of my lethargy, and the images took more or less definite proportions. Hills, I saw, and great mountains, either clear-shining beneath a radiant moon, or bathed in mists that floated over them like a congregation of spirits. I cannot define my visions; there are those, no doubt, who will understand them: but it seemed as though I were both watching these things from above (flowing

beneath me like great brown and blue waves that surged toward a predestined shore), and footing on them in a strange exultation and joy.

No doubt a part of me had been loosed, and was inhabiting such scenes as its proper place. But I seemed to know as clearly as could be that (apart altogether from the hostile spirit of Rhoda invading my room—or possibly induced by it) "The Robes of Wisdom" could not be written until I had explored in physical presence such places as in spirit I beheld. There was a proper part of vision I wanted, and it flouted me among the abodes of men.

So I strode the streets discontentedly, or tried to read stubborn books that only annoyed me. Rhoda, I felt, watched me curiously. At first she seemed as though she held out a hand over the gulf that had yawned between us. But I was driven by a destiny and could heed nothing. Then she turned about and went her own way again.

I avoided everybody, even Ramsay and Tim, who had nowadays sealed a great friendship. Everything distasted on my tongue. And the case was not improved when one day along Chancery Lane I suddenly saw a face that brought memory crying up within me. It was a broad, clean-shaven, sunburnt face, with a slight fringe of very fair hair along the cheek-bones, with two blue eyes that could have shone, had once shone, with merriment, but were now dull and discontented. The figure was of a tall, broadly-built man, in a daring suit of clothes, and a bowler hat set rakishly on his forehead.

I followed the man up Chancery Lane into Holborn, and had no difficulty in keeping him in sight among the throng of people. He was a prominent figure, and there was something of satiety and scorn as he walked among the smaller men than he. I had no wish to speak with him, but only followed him whimsically. I felt like a looker-on at the pageant of life as I followed him, and had no wish to break this effect by speaking with him.

Then he turned away to the right up towards a quiet square surrounded by what looked like lawyers' offices. Automatically I followed him. It seemed very odd to me that I should be able to follow him so, like a wraith of the past. I must

even, I suppose, have imagined myself as invisible, for when he looked round once or twice I paid no heed.

At last he faced about with an insolent and challenging expression. Possibly he would have said something but that I held steadily forward towards him. I was still half fancying myself as a looker-on from an invisible post of vantage, when I heard my voice saying :

"Isn't your name Cartwright?" I had spoken as though it had been an inexpressibly humorous thing that the fact should be so.

"It is," said he, his challenge changing to expectancy.

"That's an odd thing," I said.

He drew himself up again.

"My name's Elthorne."

"Elthorne!"

"Jacob Elthorne."

"Hell!" he burst out, after a moment of preparatory astonishment. "Jack Elthorne! Oh, my God! Let's go and have a drink!"

I knew well his type. He had become one of those Englishmen whose conception of manliness was of the beefy, beery and expletive order: that being the main average of their lives, with golf, boxing and bawdy tales for decoration.

As we drank each other's healths in honour of our merry meeting, he asked :

"And what the devil are you doing?"

"Oh, writing!" I was still inexpressibly amused at the encounter.

"Writing! What the hell kind of writing? Not books!"

"That's it: books. And in papers, you know."

"Oh, my God! But you always were an odd devil."

"Was I?"

"Oh yes, you were. You were a bossy kind of a chap, with all kinds of fantastic notions. You used to damned well own that top room in your infernal way. I never could stand writing myself, you know. Nor reading, neither. Unless it's a book by — now and again." He mentioned a racy writer whose name lined the street-posters. "The Buff-fellow's more in my line."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Hell only knows. Every damned mother's-son of a job. And messed everything up."

"But you are surely doing something now." I surveyed his well-conditioned figure. At school he had been great of bone and well-proportioned, I remembered, but this now had run to heaviness, the heaviness of a decaying athleticism.

"God, yes," he said carelessly, even shiftily. "I'm surveying this damned England; building, you know, and that kind of thing; getting fool-builders to build and fool-buyers to buy. A man must live somehow, damn it all. I don't know what the devil some of us would do if there weren't fools about. Have another drink?"

"It should be my shout this time."

"Very well. I'll repeat."

He did repeat, and he repeated a good many times before we finally parted. I will say for him that the day was hot enough. But his manner was that of one to whom his whiskey was a habit much the same as blowing his nose might be.

"Are you married?" I asked. I still felt my whimsical oddity, and asked the question purely out of mischief.

"Damn my aunt, that's good: when I can get the same pleasures without any of the bother! Not much! You aren't?"

"Oh yes."

"Sorry I spoke then. Each to his own kind of pleasure, I suppose."

My dream-world (if so it may be called) passed away at this, and I saw him in the full light of day—with something of revulsion, and a profounder feeling of tragedy, for I had often thought of my old chum Cartwright. I changed the subject.

"Have you ever seen anything of Ransome?" I asked, thinking of the other member of the trio of chums that had once existed, with myself as the connecting link.

"Good God, yes! We spent one or two of our holidays together. But he was a squeamish sort of devil, and couldn't get on with a man like me, I suppose. He is the manager of some engineering works in Kent, and is doing damned well, I believe. He got married too."

"And old Warner?"

"Oh, he's some damned dean, or canon, or something of that kind in the goody-goody line. He always was a par-

sonical kind of devil. He wrote to me a lot once, hoping to convert me, I suppose." And as he snorted in contempt I could not help recalling that he had once been Warner's great favourite at school.

My mood of whimsey had now effectually passed; I could no more regard him as from another world; and so I found it hard to continue speaking with him. I declared my intention of proceeding on my way; whereupon he declared his intention of coming along with me.

We did not stir reminiscences again. We held firmly to the ordinary topical course of conversation. We threaded our way through the network of streets in the direction of Charing Cross, where he at last complained of the heat of the day and suggested another drink. I professed haste, and as we parted he turned in to satisfy his thirst.

I said nothing to Rhoda of our meeting. It was typical of my mood at that time that I had begun a strangely isolated life within my mind, where the very isolation was the chief source of pleasure. I sat that evening smoking in my study, passing in review my schooldays. Frank, Cartwright and Ransome were the chief figures in the procession. One I had never seen since his impulsive farewell of me; nor did I wish to see him, for my inconceivable distance from the other two afflicted me; Cartwright was as far removed as a man could be; and my own brother, in his splendid house at Brighton, and his distant patronage of the things I cared for, was in no better case.

Later on, Ramsay came in for a smoke, and from him I learnt that Rhoda had gone out. But I said nothing to him. I felt as though I could let no skiffs from the mainland push off for the island in which I passed my mental life.

XVIII

I AWAKE

This state of affairs could not long continue. It continues, to be sure, in an amazing mass of the married lives of England : the husband going his one way, and the wife her other, neither of their orbits touching the other save at the solemn ritual of meals. But it could not continue. Each of us had our ideals that it affronted.

I am not going to follow out the perplexed mental labyrinth by which we arrived at the solution of our tragic-comedy. Outside my own introspective curiosity it can have little interest. My island-life continued without intermission for some months ; indeed, it has, since that time, become more or less a fixed constitution of my mind. But I began to be afraid of it in time, because I saw the effect it was having on Rhoda.

It is impossible in life to serve only one loyalty. Whether I would or not my major loyalty had to be my Art, for it was to me not an execution only, but an explanation of the whole purpose of life, mine and others, in its implicit philosophy. Disloyalty to it would have made me no more than a foam of the wave flung up on the sand. But part of that inspiration (to put it at its humblest) was founded in love and the discipline of strife, in both of which Rhoda and I had been married. I considered, once or twice, the idea of parting from her, of going my own way and relinquishing her to hers, but it was, even in my thought, like the pain of tearing limb from limb. It was not to be endured even in the fancy.

These were, in the old figure, the horns of my dilemma. In philosophical phrase, the antinomy was constitutional. Any resolution, to me then, seemed annihilation.

I began to evade the real weight of the issue by pretending to myself that my indifference was only sulkiness, and by forcing myself to seek Rhoda out and live my life with her. During the late summer of that year, and all the succeeding winter, we lived a social life together, and even renewed much of our affectionate interchange. But it was an empty show, for " The Robes of Wisdom " continued untouched, and that fact lay like lead on my spirit. She knew it as well as I.

I had so far lost touch with her that I found it hard to follow the developing attitude of her mind, save at moments when the warmth either of affection or opposition brought our spirits together, and so I could not say how she thought about our new, and unsatisfactory, union of life. But it was plain to me that she as much as I had her island-life, at least so far as I was concerned. And I was full of fears because of that.

It was a figure of our life now that when, in the spring, her next novel was published, neither of us made any allusion to the fact. We skirted it decorously. There was no dinner in celebration, nor did I see a copy of the book, save in book-sellers' windows. We neither of us went into the other's study. And that was the symbol of the hidden warfare.

It flamed out at the least provocation, and was as discreetly covered again. For example, we had once been out to a private show at some Picture Exhibition, and as it was late were standing at the corner of Piccadilly deciding where we should dine. It was too late to go home, and as we were not (in society's slang) dressed, our choice was restricted. I declared for one of the places I was in the habit of frequenting, she for a select place that I feared. I, for myself, could not afford the object of her choice, and so our contention really became a symbol again, as most of our contentions were in the habit of becoming.

Then I saw a familiar figure crossing the road from New Coventry Street. "Here's Tim," I cried, "he shall join us."

It was one of the most uncomfortable meals I have ever known. Rhoda said nothing to Tim the whole meal through, save in one or two frigid replies to enquiries of his. Consequently the conversation between Tim and myself was almost as awkward. And it was the same on our way home.

Small blame to him, nothing could induce Tim to enter the house. He was virtually a stranger to our flat, and so, having seen Rhoda in, I went along with him for awhile.

Tim was the last person on the earth to display resentment, but there was keen resentment in his voice as he spoke.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Elthorne doesn't like me, let me say, Jack.

But she needn't wave it out like a flag, I may add. Not a bit of it."

"I am sorry, Tim," I said, taking his arm. It would have been stupid to have disguised the fact. Besides, what right had Rhoda to treat my friends so? I was commonly civil with her Fortescue person. Tim, in our new way of life, was presumably a "vulgar person."

"You aren't publishing any more books, let me say, old man," Tim added, and the point of the remark was so obvious that I flushed. It was a strange thing to find Tim coming out in attack. Like most peaceable persons he was uncommonly direct in attack.

"My next book needs a lot of thinking over," I said, and it was true for, though I could not write at it, my thought had struck on some new developments in it.

"Not writing," he continued incisively.

"There isn't much need for it in the present state of affairs."

"You are drifting, old Jack, I may say. Old Ramsay and I were talking about it the other day. The hit has gone out of you. Oh yes! You don't stir things up now and——" He halted, for my distress must have been obvious.

"Oh, Tim," I said out, "what in the name of heaven am I to do? This life is killing me. It's a contradiction of all that I stand for. My life's based on it; in fact, it is partly based on two things that drift naturally apart, and how on earth can I resolve it?"

"You can write, what's say? If I could write—how I would live then, and not bother about the outside. You can do that, eh what?—what's say?"

He was eager to help me, feverishly eager, but he could not understand my difficulty. How could he, when it was an enigma to myself? And when we parted he was, dear old fellow, nearly in tears at my distress, and as much puzzled at the cause of it. His handshake was a thing to remember.

I determined to attack Rhoda fiercely about her attitude to Tim; and doubtless she had come to the same resolve about my insistence on Tim's companionship; for between the two resolves, while each waited for the other, it fell to the ground between us, and was not mentioned.

But I was resolved to wake from my lethargy, to continue

my book, and, if need be, to assail the enemy first by a powerful attack so as to justify my position and hold it firm before the enemy. Tim had said I no longer stirred things up. It was a penetrating remark. I resolved to stir things up.

XIX

THE BLOW FALLS

I did so. More than a little feverishly I went round the following day in the attempt to procure reviewing ; to procure books of such a kind as would enable me to strike my sword in the proper place. It is not my conception of reviewing, but such was my mood. It was rather a foolish, even a petulant, mood, yet there it was. And what should destiny put into my hands but Ella Fortescue's latest sentimental romance !

I am not going to put the weight of it on the shoulders of destiny. It was I who accepted the book whoever and whatever it was that placed it there. And I accepted three copies of the book, for three separate reviews. Two of them, it should be said to my credit, I returned, for I have always attempted to hold myself free from the churlish, and often far from disinterested, practice of writing four or five anonymous attacks on the one book, such as some men habitually do. The third I kept was for a journal that signed its reviews ; and succinctly and gleefully, over my proper signature, I attempted to show that the tendency of this manner of thing could only be, in the highest sense, irreligious, immoral, and decadent, since such things were the natural outcome of sentimentality, a corruptive lack of forceful spirituality, snobbery and effete religiosity.

I enjoyed that article as I had enjoyed few things for the

better part of two years. But before I despatched it I felt in honour bound to show it to Rhoda.

"I thought you had better see this before I sent it, Rhoda," I said, handing it to her one morning after breakfast.

I scanned the daily paper while she read it. How often she did so I do not know, for it was long ere she spoke.

"Do you find it necessary to send this, Jack?" at length she said.

I looked up, but said nothing. She held my paper in her hand, and, as she looked on it, her forehead was puckered in a curious perplexity, that seemed uncertain of the form into which it should resolve itself.

"I don't see," she explained, "that you need go out of your way to attack Ella's book."

"It's not an unfair review," I said.

"I suppose it's not," she admitted slowly.

"I refrain from any hint of personality, I give instances for every fault I charge—indeed, she would admit my instances, and probably call them social virtues; and it is plain that I am concerned for something far more important than the mere business of book-making. It is signed, you see, and therefore honourable."

"It wouldn't so much matter if it were not signed," she said. I looked at her in surprise. Was she merely jealous of her friend, or was this my old Rhoda seeing the thing, for a moment, from the old point of view that was as much hers as mine at one time? But she was inscrutable.

"You mean that I must cease attacking certain kinds of humbug when I see them, at one sudden moment, because at that one moment you have taken to yourself a friend who is one of the foremost examples of them—I should say, teachers of them. I must sheath my sword, I must fold my banner, and spend my days in sleep, because my wife has gone over to one of the opposing camps. You must come and spill the cup of what I, in my strange way, consider my destiny, into the sand—and claim that right because I love you."

She looked steadily at me as I spoke. Suddenly, to both of us, our cleavage seemed a sharp and distinct thing. The recognition of it entered into our speech.

"And you claim, I suppose, that your work fulfils the great claims you make here?"

"I would rather claim nothing now—I am not working."

"You do so claim."

"Very well, I do. So did you : once."

"Do you consider the humiliation this would put on me?"

"It pains me to consider it."

"I thought you didn't believe in reviews of attack."

"Not unsigned. But this has become a kind of symbol in my spiritual freedom. It will not diminish her popularity, I may say. Her sales will still continue to be the envy of us all."

"You do well to speak of envy."

"If you think that, you are right to say it."

After a lengthy silence she rose up, and presently returned to the room ready for the weather.

"You are going out?" I said.

"I am going to Ella," she replied.

Holding my review in my hand I turned her remark over in my mind while she fastened her gloves. In the drawn battle she went over to the adversary, so it seemed. It was a curious fulfilment of my earlier remark. The whole thing was very complicated too.

"What to do?" I asked.

"To tell her of your attack."

I rose up and faced her.

"Rhoda," I said, "if I went out and was unfaithful with my body to you, you would consider yourself justly affronted. If the mind is greater than the body, isn't a mental unfaithfulness a greater matter than a bodily?"

"The thing isn't comparable at all."

"No, it isn't, it's identical."

"That's a verbal quip."

"It isn't, really : but still ! I say you are being mentally unfaithful in allying yourself with my mental foe."

"I'm afraid," she said with fine scorn, "you are rather old-fashioned. You want me to be your mental chattel."

"I despise mental chattels, and I could never despise you. I may remind you, too, that there are many would consider you old-fashioned in objecting to bodily unfaithfulness."

"We can't stand for ever haggling like this. I am going out to call on Ella."

All the bitterness of years frothed up into my brain at this, and her clean, decisive way of saying it.

"And you are right to go," I said. "You are not being unfaithful at all. You are declaring your mental identity with the object of my attack, my honest and necessary attack. You were unfaithful years ago, and it is to Ella Fortescue you owe the major fidelity now. You are not being unfaithful now, you are being faithful; that is how it is. That is the shattering irony of it, for our marriage is nothing but a mockery in the sight of high intention, clean strife and pure Beauty. With every vital force of my being I call the curses of the Centre of the Universe on the day when I invented Ermott Jacob, and on all the works of Ermott Jacob."

Striding past her where she stood I went into my room for my boots. I had to go out into the open air, for I could not contain myself in closed quarters. I felt as though I were being stifled.

When I passed out again Rhoda was sitting before the fire, looking at the flames leaping yellowy and sickly over the coals in the cold autumn sunlight. I paid no heed to her, but went violently out.

How I spent that day I do not remember. My mind was too agitated to hold consecutive images. I have a distinct memory that evening of sitting in an alcove off the lounge of one of the music-halls, drinking liqueurs and holding a vigorous discussion with two daughters of joy who were endeavouring to convert me to an epicurean philosophy—to their interpretation of it, anyway. Only as one of them, a woman with a magnificent presence, was sardonic and bitter, they did not commend their inducement. It was early in the evening, and when they saw I was not to be overborne, they did not bother me, and were very comradely. The magnificent one had had a tragic history, for she was too contemptuous of life to have lied. It was fairly late when I returned, and I went straight to my own room.

As Rhoda was often in the habit of having her breakfast in bed it was not strange for me to have breakfast alone; but when, as I sat reading the paper afterwards, the house-keeper came to ask me if I should be in or out that day, something odd in her manner at once caught my attention. She was always a pursed-up sort of woman; but this seemed

suddenly to have become a very radiation of sniffing antagonism.

"What about Mrs. Elthorne?" I asked.

"Mrs. Elthorne?" She seemed surprised.

"Yes," I said militantly, "what about her? What are our arrangements for to-day?"

At my attack she became more subdued, but it seemed to take the form of cold raillery, if one may imagine raillery in old parchment.

"She wasn't here last night. She left a letter for you, she told me to say, in your study."

A sudden coldness seemed to seize at my very heart. I could scarcely breathe for oppression, and I had the utmost difficulty in sitting perfectly still, and not humbling myself before this odious woman's implied raillery. Apprehension laid hold of me like a fever. But I succeeded, I believe, in revealing nothing, in holding myself still, and in saying as though with natural impatience:

"Very well. I'll speak to you later."

As soon as she had gone I went at once to my study, and on my desk, surely enough, there was the letter from Rhoda. It read simply thus:

"DEAR JACK,

"I have been thinking a lot over what you said, and I have decided to leave you. Many times I have thought of it, for everything has gone wrong with us the two years or so now closing. But as I made up my mind that if ever I left you it would be finally, never to return, I had no wish to come to a sudden decision. Now I am going. It will be useless to try to write to me, for I shall leave no address. You will not be able to find me, and I shall not return. Our ways had much better be apart. That is decided.

"Don't forget you are due to go to the Statham Willies for the week-end. I have written to say that I can't come, and that you will come alone. I shall write next week explaining why, but you had better keep up the farce of my being ill, as I said.

"The keys are with Miss Kerr. She will look after you well. Of course you have your cheque-book; and you must use it. You may not like Ermott Jacob, but you have a kind of right

in that property. You invented the name, and you invented the style. I would not have thought of it myself.

"I hope you will be well and comfortable.

"RHODA."

The letter had evidently been dashed off in haste. I read it again, not now perturbedly, but bitterly, and in a vain attempt to penetrate to the mind of the writer. Did she really think, knowing me, that I should continue to draw Ermott Jacob's money? Either she had become more remote from me than even I had thought, or she wished to snatch a virtue easily. I decided on the former as preferable. Then about the Statham Willies—it was ridiculous. I sat down forthwith, and wrote saying that unfortunately I could not come, briefly saying why.

Curiously my grief seemed to have become cold and dead in me. I lit my pipe, and sat before my fire, proposing to think things out. But I fear my ruminations became a bitter setting-forth of my wrongs to the undeliberating coals. For the first time in my life I took knowledge of my age. Once a paroxysm of torment would have seized on me, but now, to the maturer settlement my mind had achieved, a grimness, a caustic bitterness, had seized on me. The shock, I vaguely realised, was more acute, it was more terrible, but it had driven me in on myself, whereas once it would have driven me out in abandon. The make-up of my mind had, I suppose, become inverted.

Again before my eyes there came the vision of flowing hills misty beneath an attentive moon, and again it seemed to me I was walking on them in deep and mystical communion with a Presence with Whom communion meant unutterable peace.

It was late in the afternoon ere I went out. I walked up to the West, and walked about the West, slowly and quietly, thinking of nothing, but living acutely in my perceptions. The curious contrast of the silver-blue arc-lights with the richer, tawny-golden arc-lights, defying each other, and throwing a strangely-mingled union of their colours up against the black sky; the way in which the evening damp caused a new faint light to be reflected from pavement and street; the challenging reds and greens of the repeating advertisements that seemed somehow not to mingle with the general com-

plexion of light, but to break into a crude flower of words, and be shut away into darkness, as though they had nothing to do with the luminous haze that shone elsewhere; the peculiarly penetrating quality of the lights thrown from jewellers' windows and sweet-stuff windows: all were attentively noted by me, and adjusted into their respective balances.

The people, too, my eye observed carefully, if automatically, and I dimly realised that some of those I observed seemed to resent it, while others flashed a bright and hopeful exchange. But as neither could have reached my mind till long after the event, they only formed part of a confused retrospect. It was so I became distantly aware of a battered bowler hat, a bearded, pinched, dirty face and a disastrous pair of boots standing in a gutter, with a trunk to the curious person of a concert advertisement!

It seemed so quaint as it reverberated on my memory that I smiled grimly to myself (for I was in little mood for smiling) as I turned towards the place the advertisement had indicated. It was late, but that mattered little. I stood on the floor of the house, packed among a closely massed host of listeners, from whose lips many wisps of blue smoke were curling to the dome above, like a fragrant incense of thanksgiving. I did not know what it was that was being played as I entered, but the clang and joyous excitement of Bach was unmistakable. What a sunlit mind was his! Then Brahms' Second Concerto came, and the majesty of the *Allegro*, coming upon Bach's resonancy, followed by the haunting melancholy of the *Andante*, so perfectly coloured by the violoncello, swept me from dream to dream, from the dull pain of bitterness to a kingship that stood up on the heights and knew itself divine. The prolix and facile Mozart intervened for a spell with some song—an intruder in that company surely!—and then Beethoven's Seventh Symphony cried its musical adventure through my brain. It is impossible for pen to describe my mood as I stood and heard. I had not heard it for some three years, and now it swept over me with a significance altogether new. The wonderful second movement so far fitted in with my earlier mood as to uproot all my being, and leave no part of me that did not shiver with ecstasy. When the third movement concluded, I vaguely feared an anti-climax in the *Allegro*. But I was either very happily attuned, or the conducting was

singularly swayed by the rhythm of the whole, for its true value was caught ; with wings that seemed to beat swiftly in a thinning air it swept through its course, and left the earthly ecstasy in the heavenly places.

As I walked all the way home I scarcely knew if I did or indeed did not tread on the clouds. But one thing I knew of a surety. I knew that I was nearer than I ever yet had been to walking on the mountains that were so continually haunting my vision.

XX

SPORTSMANSHIP

The sun streamed across my room. It was one of those rich autumn mornings when the air flows like wine—not the young and sparkling vintage of the spring, but quiet, tawny and mature. In the gardens of some square that could be seen from my bedroom window, a young thrush could be heard practising his newly discovered power of song. As I heard him I could imagine him. I could see his throat swell with some unsuspected phrase, and then I could see him suddenly stop, with a poise of head that said clearly : “ Did I do that ? Did that come from me ? That was an astonishing good thing to have done ; let me try it again.” I chuckled to myself as I sprang out of bed and tried to find him. But he defied my search.

It was not until I was nearly dressed that I suddenly realised that I was now alone in the world. I stopped, facing the situation. It seemed inconceivable ; and a cry of “ Rhoda, my wife, you cannot surely mean this,” broke from my lips. I tried to imagine what she was doing, where she was, what her purposes were : and then my mind, in the natural reflex of maturity guarding against the pangs of youth,

sharpened quickly to a cynic bitterness, that was, in its degree, invaluable. Yet the strangeness of cynicism, to me, was its own pain.

Nevertheless I put my hand into my pocket for Rhoda's letter. I drew out, instead, my own letter to Lady Statham Willie. I had not sent it and she would be expecting me after all. I thought at once of sending a telegram, and then my mood began to play with the idea of going down there after all.

The result was that I was soon speeding through sun-washed landscapes to Hampshire, where the Statham Willies had their country house.

Lady Willie received me with her usual effusiveness—for it is past the bounds of possibility, surely, that anyone should feel such a strain of warmheartedness towards all her guests. She lamented with me about Rhoda's illness (upon which I said nothing), informed me that I was just in time for lunch, and assumed I would go out with the guns afterwards. Did I not shoot? Never mind, said she, there would be other men following also.

I would have avoided the ordinary rout at another time, but I now began to cling to society, for my morning alone had been searched and scorched with pain. I so shrank from a renewal of that blind and fruitless appeal of my emotions that the company of a stolid, unimaginative baronet was preferable. He was one of those men who are usually praised as being typically English. It may or may not be a just eulogy. I should have called him stupid and dull-minded, neither interesting in his strong untutoredness nor exciting in his clear refinement—a cipher only, calling for cancellation as promptly as decency would allow. He was a sort of moneyed edition of what Cartwright had become, with a kind of energy that he wasted in sport, but which might have been profitably employed in sawing wood or drawing lumber. I suppose, however, he was typical enough.

Our few miles to the covers would have been an interesting study in psychology, except that studies in self-satisfied stupidity are profitless enough. God did not make man stupid and self-contented, he became that through his own sloth of mind: and artists, in the degree of their artistry, are interested in creative powers, not in producing blocks of inertia.

The glorious autumn afternoon, flooding hill and dale rich with colours, seemed to mean nothing to my companion. It indicated to him the prospect of a good shoot, merely. I pointed out to him the glory of the sunlight as it streamed into a beech wood hanging along the brow of a hill, making its copper carpet to glow like liquid metal. It was a wonderful sight and so filled my mind with excitement that my very blood ran more swiftly in my veins. Surely there are few moments more wonderful in the life of man on earth than when such a sight strikes across the mind with its incommunicable ecstasy. But my companion looked shortly in the direction I indicated, said, "Rather jolly, isn't it?" and strode briefly on. I remembered that at lunch he had exclaimed scornfully against uneducated workmen and labourers having political power. I thought him rather an excellent person to talk, he with all his advantages, and this stupendous result!

Presently I heard a flutter ahead, and saw a most glorious sight. A beautiful cock-pheasant, in his wonderful suit of colour, flew up into the golden sunlight and headed straight for us. It was a thing to feast one's eyes upon. He seemed like a beautiful jewel, gifted with the miracle of life, sailing through a heaven of gold and blue, when suddenly a noise jarred on the silence, and I saw him stagger and fall. Bravely he arrested his fall, however, and flew upwards again, with obvious effort, when the noise jarred again, and I saw him fall like a bolt to the earth.

I was staggered and mystified. The whole thing seemed horrible and inconceivable to me. Then I saw my companion standing beside me, with a gun that smoked at both its barrels. I felt the horror of the thing drive all the blood from my face, and my hands grew clammy and cold. Without a thought of what I did, and without an instant's hesitation I struck him with all my force under his ear. He staggered backwards, dazed (for I was not light of blow), and the gun fell from his hands.

"You monstrous coward," I cried at him. "You damnable traitor."

"What the devil do you mean?" he said, putting his hand to the place where my blow began to shine out in a red patch.

"You are a damned coward, sir. You choose to mutilate

a thing of beauty, and choose it because it can't retaliate on you." Other and cruder objurgations followed this, I fear.

"You're a damned sentimentalist," he said. "Get out!"

His stolid contempt (contempt from that unrefined bull!) made my bubbling pot to boil finally over. I have a dim memory of someone seizing hold of me, whom I threw impatiently off.

"You'll defend yourself in this case, anyway," I cried, "and prove if you be coward or no."

I remember he seemed rather contemptuous in his defence at first, as I sprang at him. He had a sudden surprise, I imagine, for I was not quite unacquainted with his national defence, and I made some pretty work on his face before he quite realised the state of affairs. Again someone laid hold of me. I suppose it was a compliment to me that it was not he whom they handled. A perfect fury had seized hold of me, and it is possible that the pain and restraint of the past twenty-four hours added irritability to my anger. I know I flung them off, whoever they were that had seized me, and I know that my stolid baronet presented an uncomely spectacle before we were finally parted.

I remember seeing Sir Statham Willie standing before me with a pale face and horrified manner.

"Mr. Elthorne," he said, "I am very much surprised."

"I expect Sir Hugh Ackworth is a great deal more surprised," I said jocosely, and strode away from the company.

I was glad and gay as I strode over the fields. A grand exultation filled me, and I longed for nothing so much as to take each of that shooting party in turn, with or without weapons—that is, if they were so anxious for sport as they professed to be. But I doubt that their conception of sport was not the shedding of blood where their foe was too frail to retaliate. Come to that, sport is only justly so called at equal odds, and by that standard there is but little sport in the world. Even tiger-shooters slink up on to elephants. And assuredly, the picture of a solemn row of men, standing eagerly, each with a fire-arm in his hand, because of a rush of pheasants, should be the mock of supernal beings! No, I was not ashamed. I was glad and very gay.

But then a great sadness came over me. I strolled into an

adjacent copse, wishing to sit down and think things out. As I strode through the brushwood I disturbed some pheasants, that flew wildly away from me. But the rustling continued, and, pulling aside the bracken, I saw a pool and trail of blood. Following it out I came upon a young hen-pheasant cruelly wounded. It shrank fearfully away from me. I had to put it to death, because one of its legs and half its wing were nearly shot away; but as I did so that fresh English grass was wet with bitter tears, and they were not only of grief. Hopeless, impotent rage shook me. Rage at the irreligious, nay sacrilegious, land where such things were habitual amusement, filled me. No wonder the making of beauty was neglected in it!

Dusk was already heavy over the countryside before I returned. In my room my clothes were laid carefully out on my bed for dinner, but I seized hold of them and roughly bundled them back into my bag. In the hall I could hear men's voices from the billiard-room. Doubtless they were discussing my breach of what they called their etiquette. Well, they could continue to discuss, for all I cared! As I threw on my overcoat Lady Statham Willie came into the hall.

"I am going, Lady Statham," I said. "I cannot stay here longer."

"I am sorry," she said, for the first time with a restraint in her smile. "Of course I have every sympathy with your protest—a man of your sensibilities."

"Excuse me, Lady Statham, that cannot be. I noticed the wing of a beautiful bird in your hat to-day."

"You will excuse me," she said proudly, "but do you not rather forget the address of a gentleman to a lady?"

"My dear madam," I replied, "I think it is time we refused the title of gentleman or gentlewoman either to those who butcher, trade in butchery, or accept its results." And I fled down the steps with my bag into the dark.

I had to wait long on that exposed countryside platform for a train, and when I reached London it was exceedingly late. I could not very well return home. It would hardly have been fair, for I had said I would be away for the weekend, and probably my pursed-up bit of parchment was entertaining friends at my expense. No, I would not bend

to what would look like a trick ; besides, I yearned for company.

Therefore, I did the one thing I could do : I went round to see Ramsay. His man told me Tim was there also, and I was doubly glad.

My attire, and the bag I bore, were the first things that attracted attention, and I was at once challenged for an explanation. I gave it. I walked up and down that room, pouring out the hideous tale in all its hideousness, and it was long before the rushing anger of my words abated.

" And so you came away ? " Tim then said.

" And wouldn't you have done so ? " I asked.

" Wouldn't have been there, first place, let me say," he declared. " But," he added after a while, " what about Mrs. E. ? Leave her in it ? "

Then for the first time for many hours I remembered Rhoda's flight. I had not even given it a thought when I had decided to come round to Ramsay's flat.

" Oh," I said awkwardly, " I had forgotten that. She has left me," I said. " She left me yesterday. I am alone now."

ACT IV

IRELAND

I

BY WAY OF RETROSPECT

We all of us, as we look back over our days, must needs be impressed with coincidences and correspondences in them that lead us inevitably to the conception of a governing destiny. Some like to scoff at it as a pathetic fallacy of the highest degree, but there are none immune from it; and, for myself, I have never been of the school that thinks a desire is to be trusted inversely in the degree of its prevalence. To such a school the fact that all men, and all races of men, desire a certain thing most ardently (immortality, for example) is a convincing proof that that thing is a superstition, and consequently to be distrusted. Presumably, to it, if one man only desired a thing, and only came to desire it because of a long isolation from his fellows, whatever it was he desired (personal extinction, possibly) would be considered as a highly reasonable thing. However, that kind of squint misanthropy has never won my love. I have a strong conviction that a destiny ruled my days, and I am never more sure of it than when I contemplate this precise juncture in my life. Many lines converge at this point, but from the outlook of my work, from that, in other words, which has been to me the cause of my being, the confluence is seen most markedly.

It is one of the penalties of an autobiography of this kind that it should pre-suppose what does not appear. I have

sought to minimise this as much as possible by dealing briefly with the outlines of each of my more characteristic books as it appeared : for my wish has been to make this book complete in itself. In pursuance of this desire let me therefore, quite succinctly, survey my mental progress to the moment, thus to show how strangely things have fitted in, and how clearly my next step seemed marked out for me.

My earliest vague desires for oratory—or rather, not so much desire for oratory, as daydreams wherein I already was the orator replete with mastery—that were crushed in school-days, and brushed aside in the stress of self-styled business, were shown to have been a definite reaching forward of my spirit directly Ramsay came into my life. It was possibly part of the same chance or destiny that directs our lives that he should have put into my hands, of all conceivable books, “Sartor Resartus.” On that basis my dreams began at once rapidly to crystallise into their ordained shapes. Voice spake to voice there, and the whole force of my nature rushed into a channel where its pace and continuance were decreed by its own momentum.

“Sartor Resartus” is, I suppose, a kind of oratory : not the framed oratory of the logician, but the impulsive oratory of the poet. At any rate I began to dream books that were clearly derived from that book. My sketches and essays were only disciplinary exercises towards these books that were framing themselves in my mind. None of them were ever written. For the crystallisation went on, and, in the days and hours that succeeded, other books began to be framed where I held myself free of the closer derivation, where I, indeed, attacked some of the fundamental principles of that book. I conceived men who were heroes in the sense that they had seen some vision of the earth, some synthesis of man’s life and aspirations, some conception of Beauty, which they steadfastly sought to interpret to men in the terms of some Art ; pigment, stone or words. To me the Artist has always seemed the Supreme Teacher, not in the little pedagogic sense, not in the loud-voiced, brass-tone way of those who declare the complete will of God to elect audiences, but in the calm fact of his vision of what was beautiful, and his creation of a form that should give it a partial expression. It is idle to say (it is only the idlers who do say) that to make a thing of

beauty is not to teach. Of course it is to teach ; it teaches in the supremest of possible ways. Let me here quote some words from " Henry Hibbert," words that I put into the chapter on " His Notebook."

" What then is this Venus of Milo ? What may we mean by saying it is beautiful ? This, and surely this only, that, apart from the most natural outworkings and differences of personality, woman should be, nay in fact is, thus. Very well then, what follows ? Must we halt here and idle, and let our rich minds fall into surfeit with contemplation ? Is it not too terribly clear that if woman, not only should be, but is, thus, that every one who employs a woman under conditions that forbid, or hinder, her from attaining that beauty is uttering a blasphemy that will recoil on his soul in the Being to come with a terrible vengeance, with a fire that cannot be quenched because he, and he alone, has kindled it ? It is not only a physical beauty, a rich contour and grace, let it be marked. It might have that and yet fail. But note that poise of head, that intellectual dignity, that wise brow and eye ! There is beauty indeed. They who sin against it (in the name of Commerce, Industry, what you will) are sinning the one unforgiveable sin as surely as he who thrusts a stone down a mountain side cannot recall it, or stay the avalanche it may cause. I tremble as I stand outside factory-gates and see emerge in a stream these defaced, despoiled, butchered Venuses of Milo. Defaced by whom ? Despoiled for what ? Butchered in what cause ? By money-mongers and for money-mongering always. In some moods I could shout with savage joy to think of the terrible vengeance—where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched—that they themselves have made for themselves. In some moods I could well believe that I will laugh with the same savage joy, with the same mocking exultation, when these same blasphemers against beauty will have pressed into the depth of their souls, will they nill they, the earnings of their lives. And yet I know it will be a terrible thing to see. And what of the maker of this Venus of Milo in that day ? What of Agesandros, the son of Menides of Antioch ? I tell you, he will be one of the chief witnesses. Why ? Because he has been that all the centuries, as every artist in his manner and degree cannot but be. No wonder some industrialists wish

“to destroy, or frustrate, things of beauty in the name of utility. No wonder they seek to patronise the artist, to vitiate him, to diminish the vigour of his Art. It is the instinct of self-protection, it is the arm thrown out to fend the blow. But it is unavailing : ‘As a man soweth so shall he reap.’ See what a wonderful thing is this Venus of Milo by this Agesandros : Agesandros the artist, Agesandros the witness, Agesandros the judge, but Agesandros also the teacher, the incomparable guide to the better way !”

Here, in the finding of this one quotation, I have spent the whole morning reading through “Henry Hibbert,” and it rings as wondrously as ever it did. I have severe questionings over my books sometimes, especially the earlier books, but a reading such as this morning’s fills me with vigour. Yet here is the point I have indicated, stated unequivocally. Yet in my early work (in the phrase of Henry Hibbert) I had been less content to be a witness and more anxious to force the application ; I had wished to be more eloquent in declamation than in wisdom.

It was so for a particular reason. The life I was compelled to lead for a livelihood must be remembered. What chance had I of cultivating meditation and vision, working, as I had to, twelve to fifteen hours a day ? And without the deep cultivation of one’s vision one cannot rely fully on creation, for how can one create a form for which one has not yet seen the thing awaiting the form ? There are only two things to be done. One is, to forego the vision altogether and write journalism. The other is, to cling to such of the vision as is clear, and fill up what is lacking (through fault of opportunity or capacity) by declamation.

Yet there is a compensation. The continual act of creation is itself a cultivation of vision, and, with its cultivation thus, the vision must needs increase. And so, as my work went on in the course of its discipline it had become less and less hortatory and more and more creative, until, in “The Robes of Wisdom,” the whole process faced me, demanding elements in me I could not give.

In “Harland,” and “Hibbert,” and “Evans,” I had set out to depict characters, to criticise and analyse their work, who lived chiefly, I can more plainly see now, as men in judgment on the world. Their work was partly a criticism

of life, but deliberately so rather than implicitly so. Now, however, I had to come to a piece of work where I wished to create a character who should be positive and constructive. I had conceived the thought of a man who took his own body, emotions, desires, impulses, as the basis of his Art, and who so moulded and influenced himself that he laid hold on certain springs of power and bent the whole society in which he lived to a beautiful conception. Not that he set out so to bend it, but rather that he simply influenced it by being himself. To apply the terms of one Art to another he perfected the technique of his spirit so that he, all unconsciously, radiated power, even to the extent of subduing the so-called laws of matter to his will. For his will had become the chief law, being pure and altruistic.

It was, I see now (though none of my critics have thought long enough on the book to hint it), a conception fundamentally opposed to the doctrines of Nietzsche. He had opposed his man of power, his Uebermensch, to the altruistic man. As I worked it out, the altruistic man—the true egoist, I may say, not the mawkish sentimentalist—was the only man who could lay hold of power. He, as it were, got inside the laws of the universe so that all things worked for him, whereas the Uebermensch merely stored up a vengeance of spiritual law against himself. The hero of "The Robes of Wisdom," despite all the faults of my workmanship, stood up strong, laughed aloud, was free of his company, was healthy in the spontaneity of his desires, yet was authoritative for the truest of causes, inasmuch as he spoke from the centre of wisdom, not fearful of the earth but gladly accepting it, and yet not cringing avidly for it. He was loved widely, except by the crooked of mind. These hated him, with good cause, for he whipped them with his tongue, and went several times to prison for assault when he flogged them with a horsewhip. He was an artist, but his Art was himself, and the conditions of his Art were the secret and mystical laws of the universe.

It is clear that such a book demanded above all else close meditation and psychic experiment. And these are not things easily procured in great cities. Indeed, the surrounding psychic atmosphere of rush and irritation is itself sufficient to disrupt the necessary mood, the calm in which the mind

spins swiftly on itself. Night, when the world unfurls itself in power and Being is unhampered, was needed, and there is no Night in great cities. Night, there, is a kind of horrific Day. Hills, too, were needed, for they are the centres of psychic power, they are the nerve-ganglia of the earth. One wanted to be able to get away from men, and sit quietly until the body and spirit became part of the earth, and power throbbed through one without the inhibition of a restless will. One needed so to get within the spin of life that it would be possible to see its little rhythms, its minuter whorls, as patiently and surely as the larger rhythms, and even the gigantic whorls. In such a mood it should be possible positively to behold life, and to wrest its secrets, to get behind flowers, birds and trees, and discover what they mask, what they reflect, and thus to know what they are.

Great cities obviously frustrate this. But there was another frustration that I must set down fearlessly. I could never win such knowledge while living with Rhoda. I cannot be disloyal to my steadfast companion of the early, bitter years, whose courage was so wonderful, so clear-shining; but the truth must be said, brutal though I must appear to say it, that I had outgrown her. That tragedy happens more often in married life than some conceive, and it had come to me. Had I continued to live with her, I might have been folded up and put on the shelf for all the use I would have been in the spiritual business of the universe. I doubt if she could ever have kept pace with me in the way I had to go; but when she became enthralled with "Ermott Jacob" she not only stood still, she went another way. And surely, if this life have any spiritual significance, it cannot be demanded of any one that he or she frustrate, or forego, that significance because of a diverse mate!

However that be, it was curious how my mind, robbed of the world it asked, began to create it for itself. It shrank away from Rhoda sensitively, even against my will, and it began to create great hilly landscapes for its contemplation. I would sometimes (particularly while attempting to work at "The Robes of Wisdom") surprise myself living delightedly in such landscapes, and walking delightedly on such hills; and the thought of Rhoda, if it recurred at such moments, would hurt like the cut of a whip.

I was ripe for a change, and it was at that precise moment that the change came, along a wholly different line of approach that had carefully been prepared for years.

II

MY DREAM-MOOD BEGINS TO CRYSTALLISE

It may be decided that, at a certain moment in a man's physical state, an operation may be necessary before health may succeed. But that does not make the operation the less painful. I can quite clearly see that Rhoda and I had to part before I could again take up the use of my life, but at the moment my wild cry was only to get her back.

I paced to and fro about my rooms crying on her name. I walked the streets fiercely, in the hope of stilling my pain, or even of seeing her face, though I had a sure instinct that she had gone abroad. But nothing gave me ease. To escape from myself I asked Tim to come up and stay with me. This he did, and I cannot tell how I would look forward to his return of an evening. We would sit of an evening smoking, or I would work, at odd journalistic tasks, feverishly, while he would read—or, as I think, watch me closely. We had travelled far from the days when he sat opposite me in Thames Street, and gauged my moods with that quiet instinct of his; but the change was only one of deeper stillness, for the understanding was the same.

I had not thought to let Frank know that Rhoda had left me. It was, of course, negligent of me, seeing there was little hope of her return; but we moved in different worlds, and I had not even thought of him. So I was surprised one morning to get a letter of commiseration from him, followed

soon after by a telephone message asking me to dine with him that night, "as he was staying in 'Town.'"

By the same post I got a letter from Statham Willie, and I assumed, therefore, that Rhoda's letters were arriving. It was a kindly letter, saying he had every sympathy with the "protest of an artistic nature" (why will stupid people condone matters that offend them on the conception of artistic irresponsibility?—or are they more adroit than stupid?) especially as I had doubtless been in a state of distress and pain. He added that he hoped our friendship would not be greatly impaired. I should have replied to him. I had no intention of resuming the friendship he spoke of, for I knew it only existed on the basis of his being a patron of Art—whatever that should be—instead of both of us being servants of Beauty. But I was strained, and fretted, and took no notice of his letter.

I was in the same state of tension with Frank that night. He was very kind and sympathetic, and as we sat at dinner we must have made a strong contrast. My very deep blue eyes, dark hair and beard against his brown eyes, broad, fair face, clean-shaven, and brown, curly hair, would not, I think, have led any one to imagine we were brothers. Moreover, he was very patient with my churlishness.

"But don't you know where she is?" he asked me for the fourth or fifth time.

"Oh, my good God, Frank," I broke out, "haven't I told you I don't? Why do you keep asking me the same question? Do you think I would be here if I did?"

"I am sorry," he murmured, and busied himself with his soup.

"How is business?" I asked apologetically.

"Oh, very trying and anxious," he said.

"I like your conception of trying and anxious," I said, surveying his portly, well-conditioned figure and air of success.

"Oh, I know you think I have a very easy time of it," he said, "but it's not quite so simple as you think. Still, about Rhoda—what do you propose to do?"

An irascible reply was on my lips to this utterly futile question, but I checked it, and said instead: "What would you propose?"

"It's not so easy, you know," said he, and I declare I believe the man did not see how he had exposed the futility of his own question. But he liked worrying at these things, and I had known what I was being asked to that morning, so I could not very well complain.

"She's not going to return, you think?" he asked.

"You have her letter," I said.

"Yes, it's very trying. It's difficult to know what to suggest. You know how sorry I am for you."

"Viola fit?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes, thanks."

"And the kiddies?"

"Oh yes."

"Give them my love," I said.

"I will, I will," he said with great heartiness. "But now about your affairs: I am glad to see Rhoda says she admits your right to share in her books."

"Did she say that?" I asked, and wondered how little some men thought of the proper pride of their fellows.

"Yes, in her letter," he said, looking quickly at me. I suppose something in my voice caught his attention.

"Very kind of her, I am sure—especially seeing it's the cause of our separation!"

"You writers are odd people," he said in the way of concession. "But you are not going to do anything foolish?" he added with a touch of anxiety.

"I certainly am not, if to touch her money be a foolish thing."

"You know very well I meant just the reverse," he said, with a flush coming over his face, and a quick shadow of annoyance.

"Oh!" said I.

Our conversations were ever the same, they never led to anything. We see-sawed, and pulled traversely, and in the end resumed our first positions, but at the cost of much irritation and anger.

Yet something emerged ever from the futilities of that conversation. For when the fruit was removed, he gave me a superb cigar, ordered another bottle of an excellent champagne he had discovered, and sat back in his chair with every intention of resigning himself to the heavy luxury of post-prandial

contentment. His eyes became dreamy, his cheeks grew like a well-ripened peach, and his voice sank into a modulated, not too hasty, tone. At such times, as I knew, he would grow wonderfully sentimental—in what one may call the fatal-regret manner of sentiment. I smoked my cigar, and began to watch for the signs. I wondered whether the topic would be the poor or the architectural dilapidations of London. To my surprise it was neither.

"You know, Jack," he said, watching the wisp of smoke float away from his cigar, just where the ash joined the brown leaf, "it's very strange to think of the way we have come. Do you ever think of the pater?"

"I can't say I do."

"Or the mater?"

"Not so often as I should, I'm afraid." Dear old mater! How odd to think of her watching us then, great, strong, grown men, both of us older than she when she died.

"Do you remember Saggart?" he continued.

"I do," said I; dazedly, maybe, for a blow seemed to strike across my eyes as he spoke. I saw the hills of my dream-state, suddenly. I saw the hills around Dublin, and behind them, hills on hills, and stretches of bogland. As from a distance I heard his voice continue:

"I often think of those days, you know. Here we are, continually getting older. Life passes us, and what does it all amount to? It's all very strange."

A silence elapsed, as I pulled myself out of my dreams to say: "And do you remember the hiding I gave you for calling me Jacob?"

He flushed with annoyance and looked round at me. "I'm not so sure that it was you who won," he said.

"I haven't the least doubt," I said.

"You wouldn't have," said he, grumbling, and yet turning the edge with humour. He was loth to lose the sense of luxury, in a bicker as to ancient rights.

And so we played the ancient game of memory-hunting over those excellent cigars and the old port which followed the champagne. Frank was a man who knew how to attend to his wines, and he played the accompanying sentimental luxury to the full.

It might almost be said that I walked home on the hills of

Dublin, so completely had I been transported to them. My nostalgia of the past months had suddenly become a loud cry through my whole being. It was as though, from the heights where I seemed to stand, I could see the whole of Ireland stretched beneath me, and its magnet-power drew me so that it was even a pain to me to continue in that half-trance.

Coward that I was, I believed I feared the inevitable conclusion, for it meant the dragging up of many rusted anchors. But in the depths of me I seemed to know that the conclusion was indeed inevitable.

III

I TAKE MY DECISION

I said not a word to anyone, but let the matter turn over in my soul, until the cry was so plangent, the nostalgia was so acute a pain, that I could no longer delay action. Yet action meant a very great deal to me. It not only meant cutting myself away from my friends and from the haunts where I was known. This may not have meant so much. Parkins, Jenson, Wolton of the *Morning News*, and those other odds and ends of my acquaintance, whom I met every fortnight at the Highway Tavern for dinner and talk, had no real part in my life. I went seldom, these days, to the Highway, because of that, and because the endless discussion of the same things became very like the affected pose of young office-boys with pens behind their ears, "talking shop." One could tell to a nicety what each man was going to say, and in what words he would say it. There was none of the unexpectedness of life in it. There was none of the strewing of good gold

and common brass which makes life so infinitely interesting a thing. The dross, in the talk of those men, had been all carefully refined away, and the result was very tiring in its sameness. "The highest is never attained save at the risk of the abysmal," someone had said. Certainly those men never took the risk: they would, almost to a man, have lifted their eyebrows at, and turned cold stares on, so lackadaisical an attempt. Theirs was a true literary circle, and there was none of the glorious adventure of life in it—adventure in the teeth of hazard and spiritual danger. As a change I liked their company well, but most surely it would be no hardship to forego that company because of the resolve I had to make.

With Ramsay and Tim it was different. They were my only intimate friends, and it would be a wrench to leave them. It sounds unnecessary to put it so acutely: it will be asked—could I not easily return now and again? True, I could, but a wrench is a wrench nevertheless. Moreover I knew further what it meant. My books meant no livelihood to me: their monetary return was but thirty or forty pounds a year. I was dependent upon journalism, and I knew only too well that "out of sight" was "out of mind" in that profession.

When I mentioned the subject to Ramsay and Tim in my study one evening, I was, I confess, stricken at Tim's speechless consternation. Ramsay, in his quiet way, advanced all the difficulties I would have to face, dwelling chiefly on the matter of my livelihood. But I had thought of that. I looked round the room I sat in, and said:

"These should keep me for the first year or so, and by that time I shall see my way a little more clearly."

"Your books!" cried Ramsay, genuinely alarmed.

I could not help smiling at his shock, who was usually so firm and calm. It marked the fact that a cleavage, of a sort, had come between even this old friend and myself. I wanted a knowledge that was not to be found in books—though, surely, there were certain men, mainly poets, whom I would need with me—whereas he had long since become wedded to the idea of books. I winced a little, therefore, at his exclamation, as he sat suddenly up in his chair. Tim, I think, sympathised more fully, but I felt his pain of spirit striking on me

as I sat beside him. It cried out for sympathy, so silent was it. I have seldom felt so moved in my life.

"I cannot take them with me, anyhow," I said.

"But my dear Jack," he protested, feebly endeavouring to grasp the enormity of the thing.

"They ought to fetch three or four years' careful keep if I live very simply, even on a forced sale."

"Never!" said Ramsay, rising strenuously, as his wont was, from his astonishment. "Name your price, and I'll hold them for you."

"I'd sell the copyright of my books, past and present, to any man who would give me sufficient to live on in peace for the rest of my days. The State ought to do that."

"And therefore the State won't. It will sooner spend millions, not to say priceless blood, over rich men's trading rights. And nor will I, for I'll store your books for you."

"I'm earning a bit now," said Tim's choked voice beside me. "You've a right to that, may say."

"Old Tim," I said, and laid my hand on his knee. We were all suddenly silent with emotion. A calm too full for words had settled on the three of us.

"Nearly three hundred, it is, let me say," he continued bravely, and his eyes were not dry. "Wouldn't be half that, wasn't it for you: not it. You've a call to it, old Jack."

"And I earn eight to nine hundred a year," spoke Ramsay's deeper voice from the other end of the room, "and again owing to you. Tim's right, Jack, you've a right to let us keep you."

"Go to hell, the both of you!" I said.

So we sat and smoked away the silence so pregnant with emotion till Ramsay's voice was again heard.

"Two hundred from the two of us—we could arrange the details between us, Tim," he said, speaking his aside hastily to Tim. "That should help to support."

"That should keep a damned nabob," I said, "but I'm not going to take it, all the same."

"Jack," began Tim.

"Yes, you are," said Ramsay. "Tell me this: if you offered it to me, the case being reversed, and I refused, what would you think of me? Then imagine our feelings."

He was right. In the name of our friendship I had no right to refuse, however I might, and did in obstinacy, continue to frustrate the idea. In the end, however, I consented to take a pound a week from each of them, they to hold my books till such time as I might want them. The sale of the furniture of the flat would, I reckoned, provide me with funds sufficient for a modest balance. The better part of it was such as Rhoda would need when she resumed her social life, and this I had stored in her name. The rest was sold on my account, and I wrote her a letter, addressed to her publishers, telling her what I had done.

Till the very day of my leaving England I did not hear from her. I knew this restraint cost her something, and I marvelled at it. It convinced me that, either the thought of me was dead in her, which I could scarcely credit, or that she had herself very well in hand. And in either case to seek a reconciliation was to cry for the moon, with one of Rhoda's keen cast of mind.

Thus, one early spring night, as the Irish mail train drew slowly out of Euston station, I leaned out of one of the windows watching Ramsay and Tim as they stood bareheaded on the platform. Ramsay was calm and smiling, but Tim was white and strained, his rat-like brown eyes looking hungrily up the platform, and his pink skin very pale and drawn under his red hair freely sprinkled with white. As for myself, I did not think so modest a removal could have affected me as it did. Possibly it was owing to the fact that I was turning to a new way of life.

IV

IRELAND

It was thirty years since I had been in Ireland, yet, as the boat drew in at Kingstown Pier, and the rich speech of the porters came across to me, I thrilled and quivered like a tuned string to its note. No friendship or loyalty seemed comparable to this beloved land, and England, land and people, seemed as foreign as the remoter Caucasian steppes. That strange, wild spirit that sweeps the land, austere and intangible (diversely known as *Grania ni Mhaille*, *Caitilin ni h-Ulaichan*, and by a score of secret names) seemed at once to know me and touch me till I thrilled. Yet I was half ashamed to meet her. I felt like some wanderer in cities returning to his mother Earth: who steals timidly forth to her bosom, as though trusting that she will not notice the town-stains on him, however much he himself may be aware of them, hoping that he may at once be caught to her bosom. So it was I felt, at once humble and glad.

I do not explain these things. I set them down. I have been a man who has rather kept to himself than sought company—not in misanthropy, but in a sensitiveness that no one understood save Tim—but that morning, in a joyousness that some will deem pathetic and some will look at with superior eyes, every man was welcome to me. I walked the streets of Dublin in the spring sunshine like a warfarer come home, rather surprised that the rest of my fellows should walk the streets and seem so little to realise the wonder of their presence in this beautiful place. I insisted on two jarvies that day drinking with me, and in each case called for whiskey on behalf of all those present, and had the blessing of God called many times on me.

In that most English of Irish cities I was in an air as different from that of England as ever I might be in Bruges itself, where I had fled sometimes under pressure of work to conclude. By that strangest of national indications, atmosphere, I had come into a different nation. At first I was overwhelmed into a sentiment that trembled on weakness, but at all times I breathed freely, and felt as though I were at home; with this difference, that I had all the marks of the stranger, the foreigner

on me. In my heart I might feel, even overwhelmingly, at home, but my outer way of life decreed me an outlander. My speech was different, even the clothing of my thought was different, and I never really got near to the heart of a man there. But I wished to do so, and I had not felt the inclination to do so before. I even wished to do so quite promiscuously, which was a thing much unlike me in the past. I did not wish to be a spectator, I wished to be a participator, and the glow of warmth this introduced into me is quite indescribable. I almost desired every man to stand towards me as Ramsay and Tim had come to stand in the past, and I was startled at the wildness, and even pitiful wildness, with which I endeavoured to achieve this. I bent the whole powers of my mimetic ability in order to approximate myself to the people, in my strife towards this end. There was, to be true, the cry of my spirit claiming an affinity, that urged me to this. And there was also the oddness of suddenly finding a home on earth where I was largely a stranger.

Like one returning to health, who does not too quickly take strong food, but dilutes it according to his need, I remained in Dublin a week or so. I knew some men there, whom I had met in London, whose work I admired, and these, towards the end of my stay, I sought out. I did not do so at the beginning, however, as I had no desire to lay shackles on my liberty. To have sought out acquaintances would, to my mood then, have been to belong to a portion of the city; but to remain at large, and unhindered, was to belong to the whole city.

I went down to Saggart, too, after a while, though I had shrunk from that at first. I scarcely knew my way about in parts of it, so greatly had it changed. But I found out our cottage. To my grown figure, and new adjustment of sizes, it seemed inconceivably small. It had been split into two cottages, with sundry alterations and enlargements to that end, and the tennis-lawn of many encounters was now a thickly-strewn potato-patch. The trees had been cleared away to the right, and it now no longer was nested in seclusion.

"It's a good day," said the owner of one of the cottages, passing into his place as I stood there in the evening light.

"It is indeed," said I. "May I ask how long these two places have been like this?"

"It should be twenty years, and that's the living truth," said he, "though I can't recall it myself."

"It used to be all one once."

"And that's true for you. So it used."

"I remember it so."

"Do you now? Well maybe you'll step in for a sup of milk, or maybe something stronger."

We sat in a room that looked out on to this potato-patch. It was the half of the room that had once served as our dining-room, and by looking through the door in the wainscoting division, that now swung ajar, and by shifting my vision through the years, I could see my father standing by the handsome fireplace there, and glowering over the top of his daily paper at the solitary letter that lay beside my mother's plate.

Ordinarily I would have found a keen and whimsical delight in playing the unseen looker-on through my seen person. I would have questioned the man till he would have wondered whither my questions led, and how I came to possess such uncanny knowledge of the house in which he lived. But now I only wished confidence, and the human interchange.

"I used to live in this house at one time."

"Did you now? Wouldn't that be a strange long time ago?"

"All the time I was a lad, or most of the time, anyhow."

"Was it born in it you were?"

"I was not."

"That should be a strange thing, coming into your own house after all this stretch of years. It was all one at that time, so it was. Seumas Power has the other half. We both came together to this place looking for work, we did. He and I came together, walking on the roads, the time the tinworks was disused."

"Did you come far?"

"Oh, we did."

"How far was it?"

"It was a long way, and we came walking on the roads."

"From the west?"

"It was."

"I was thinking of walking across to the west in a day or so."

"Is that so?"

"And I was wondering what would be the best road to take."

"There's many good roads, there is, and many of them is as good as others might be."

"I thought of going straight across by Mullingar and Athlone to Tuam, or perhaps Roscommon."

"Tuam, is it?"

"Yes, Tuam. I suppose that's as quick as any, quicker than most."

"It's a very good road, it is."

"That wasn't the road by which you came, I suppose."

"It was."

I suppose my inquisitiveness had made him wary of me, for we might have continued like this for ever. So I rose and asked him if it would inconvenience him at all if I had an opportunity of looking over the house.

"Inconvenience, is it? It would not, then. Sure, you're welcome, sir, and who would have the better right than the man who was bred in it, and whose father had it? I'll just speak now to Nancy Power, or maybe Sally will, and you shall see both of them."

It was Seumas Power who had the bathroom where Frank and I were ranged beneath father's eye each morning, brandishing dumb-bells with our puny, white arms in the patient hope of accumulating prodigious muscles. The tub remained in the same (with rusted iron where white paint used to be) but the rest of the room was twisted out of recognition. The bedroom we had slept in was in my host's portion, whose name I omitted to extort.

Then I walked away in the dusk that had fallen on the earth and resolved that I should no longer delay in setting out westward.

V

I BEGIN MY WANDERINGS

And so, on a fresh spring morning a few days after, I slung a small satchel over my shoulder, and might have been seen swinging across Phoenix Park. There was the restraining touch of natural habit to my new venture, for I had always taken some long walk alone in the spring, and I felt now as though this were but such another holiday.

I knew better than to hurry matters in the early stages, and so took the way easily. Yet I had reason for haste. For, while my moneys were sufficient for my slight wants when I had settled what I should do, there was (at least until I became more accustomed to the nearer range of capital) a strain on their sufficiency while I was undecided. It was too cold, for one not inured to various weathers, to sleep out; and I had even to train myself out of those fastidious ways that are a necessity in cities. For dirt is only dirt in cities: there it is an improper degradation, whereas under the untarnished sky it is but the stain of mother Earth. Yet it is not easy, any more than it is desirable, to change one's values hastily.

But these things soon adjust themselves. Man, as someone surely must have said, soon drops out of fastidious ways without woman at his side to remind him of them, and by the time I reached Athlone the poverty of my satchel's contents had ceased to inconvenience me. I had come, as I had intended to come, through Mullingar and the rich land of Meath, taking a quick and close reckoning of my journey by the change in the face of the earth as I went by. The mere picturesqueness of the scenery as I began soon changed into rolling pasturelands, and these, in their turn, grew darker and sterner, until they became mixed with bogland. Yet, even as the pastureland had changed, so the boglands changed too in their turn. They grew wilder, browner, sterner, it may be, but chiefly they grew more significant.

As I took my way through Galway, I was all the time haunted, as though there was some presence continually by me, that I knew intimately well, though I could by no means tell how this was. At first it made me uneasy. Indeed, I

must confess to a renewal of my childhood's fears of darkness. It was but natural that I should avoid walking at night, seeing the road was unknown to me, and lay poised, as it almost seemed, over treacherous bogs, that flowed up towards it like a heavy sea, indenting its edge ; but I began to detect myself putting this forward as the prime reason when my deeper motives were much less satisfactory. I laughed at myself at falling again into fearful childhood, as painting the figures of my own imagination on this pall of darkness. But I soon reflected that this is truly only a trick of the mind to defeat legitimate enquiry. And I began to examine the position carefully.

Man, I said to myself, is not afraid of nothing, and it is irrational and merely stupid to say that he is. When he is alone, be he grown man or child, he may be irked by a lack of society, but in the constitution of that restlessness there is no stray wisp of anything that may justly be called fear. Fear is only introduced into the situation by the presence of something. We are all, I reflected, in the habit of masking realities by the use of words that have no meaning in them, and, in the multitude of such words, one of them is superstition. It is at least significant that the same fears and beliefs that are found in primitive man, and which are called superstitions in them, should also be present in the mind of children, who are, obviously, either at an age before formulated superstitions may reach them, or conceived by their parents at an age when the presence of such superstitions should not be in the constitution of the organism. That is to say, by either reckoning, there cannot be such a thing as superstition in a child. When he is visited by fear, therefore, and no visible cause can be traced for it, it is at least fair to assume that this is due to an acute perception of intangible presences that belongs to the primitive constitution of man, and that has been crushed out of grown man by his many sophistications. And that this is not only a fair assumption, but an inevitable conclusion, is seen by the presence of such identical perceptions among all primitive men—as the argument infers and the fact confirms.

Fear, therefore, is a perception, at one time a perception and a reaction. When man is afraid, he is not afraid of nothing, as it would be irrational to conceive, but of something,

and his fear is an indication of that something, that is of such a nature as to escape the observation of his five senses. But fear may afflict him in broadest daylight, when it is called panic, or it may, as it more usually does, afflict him in darkness. To put it from the other side, those presences may come about him in open day, though, for some indiscoverable cause, it is their more usual custom to take their liberty in darkness. The cause is indiscoverable, though it is not beyond a sagacious conjecture. Clearly, if men are in fear of those presences, men are a hindrance, in some way, to their free operation, and it would be more desirable to hold their road through the universe, when the floating islands of personality are no longer awake to throw off their craven rays of fear, but are securely tucked away in sleep. For fear, in a free universe, is an insult, even as freedom is a spiritual heritage.

So I worked the matter out as I walked the Galway roads. And one evening I found the answer that led me out of the forks of the intellectual dilemma into which my thinking had brought me. I had resolved to make Tuam my first stop, but, having come into Galway, I had not hastened, turning about the byways further south. This day, however, I had resolved to get into Tuam by night; and as evening fell it became apparent to me that I had missed my road. It was dark, and the same uncanny fear had beset me, being by no means lessened in my uncertainty about the road I trod. I held steadily on in the glimmer of starlight, in the vain hope that, inasmuch as a road indicates a town or village somewhere upon it, I should soon strike some place that might serve as destination. The bog stretched on every hand, and there was only a pale and shadowy indication of the road beneath my feet. Judging from what I had seen in the mist of the twilight, there were no hills anywhere, no trees, no cottages, only perpetual bog—a desolate landscape, but curiously haunting, and even, in its way, beautiful. Now it was all black and sombre, rolling away till it met the terrific bend of the heavens gleaming with the myriad jewels of its stars, an unrelieved darkness against a darkness hung with gems. And every now and then as I strode along, in the intervals of my perplexity, through the still air something like a breath of wind would seem to come, and a quiver passed through me that, now, was not altogether fear.

Then I heard the sound of voices beside the road. There was no light to be seen from where I stood, but as I stepped cautiously in that direction, set back from the road a little I could see a chink of light near the earth. To my knock a voice bade me enter, and I pushed open the door and entered.

It was a roadside shebeen, very poorly lit by a dirty lamp, and the smell of stale porter and the smoke of twist tobacco accosted me as I bent my head to pass through the door.

"A tinker is it?" he asked who was evidently the owner of the place, leaning across the counter to the left, and peering through the smoky gloom at me.

"It is not," I said.

"Well, whoever it is you are, you're welcome heartily," he said.

"Oh! you're welcome, you're welcome," a chorus of voices declared, and looking quickly about, I saw a row of men sitting on benches round the house, with their backs to the wall, each with a large glass of porter in his hand. They nearly all had that strong, darkly-proud, taciturn face that I had seen so much of lately. It indicates an aristocracy that would have no cause to be abashed in the highest presence, and had a strange, spiritual affinity with this landscape of desolate bog.

"I was on the road to Tuam, but God knows where I am on the road to now," I said.

"Oh! come in, sir, come in," said the owner of the place. "It should be a dark night to be taking the road."

"You're a damned way from the road to Tuam, now," said one unemotional voice to the left of me. The speaker had a black soft hat that sat low on his brow, shading his eyes, but his equally black hair ran down in whiskers on the side of his face. They ended on a level with the line of his mouth, which seemed, perhaps partly because of that, uncannily straight and firm, almost to cruelty. His manner was like a challenge to me, and yet it was too remote, even too contemptuous, for that.

I had met many such men during the past days, and so took him in his own mood, speaking as though to myself for him to hear, rather than directly to him.

"That's my conviction, too," I said. "What I'm wondering now is whether I could make Tuam to-night."

"Oh! you could," said he.

"He could not," said the owner of the place. Then to the others he added, as they ventured one opinion or the other: "And he not knowing the road at all. This is a poor country on a dark night, mister," he said to me.

I rather admired the skill with which he swept us all in his attention.

"Tuam should be five miles from this living place, and it's a good road to be walking with the night so young."

"Ah! what's the good of your talking?" replied the man at the counter, vigorously wiping a glass for me. "And how should he know which should be the turnings, and he a stranger to this place, as anyone could see with a shift of the one eye."

The other merely spat on the floor, and took a drink of his porter, while a more eager voice affirmed:

"That's a true thing."

I sat among them drinking my whiskey as they discussed the matter. The influence of the night outside drifted in upon me where I sat in that lonely shebeen to which the men had gathered from I knew not what places. It drifted in upon me and drew me to it wondrously. The men were so much a part of the spirit of the landscape that, though they were discussing the problem of my getting to Tuam that night, I scarcely seemed absent from its influence. The spirit not only lapped about the walls of the house, but seemed actually to have encroached beyond them, to have dismissed them, and to be ruling uninterruptedly throughout the space they confined as though they were not present. The immediate scene seemed quaintly to mar the spirit of the night as little as might the unmusical, and yet not discordant, voice of a corncrake.

Yet that little mattered. It was not quite the same thing. Though the night was not kept without, the influence of its presence within the place was to draw me out. I felt it drag on my spirit, and resolved to continue my journey.

"Isn't that the very thing I'm after saying myself? If there was a decent bit of a moon to be showing the road, you might follow its drifting as easy as eat spuds. But it's

a dark night, a heavy kind of a night, and the man's a stranger at all. Will you have some more porter, Meehawl ? ”

“ I will not,” said the taciturn man opposite me. “ There are three turns in it, two turns that go to the right, and one turn would go to the left, with the lights of Tuam showing itself before you could twist your hands at that time.”

“ Sure, he has got to go on,” said another voice emphatically. “ Where the devil would he stretch himself if he didn't ? ”

“ Couldn't he stretch himself in this place ? ” said another.

“ This would be a poor place to stretch in, mister,” said its owner to me, apologetically.

“ Wouldn't the hotel at Tuam be closed up ? ”

“ And to-morrow fair-day ? ” Meehawl asked shortly.

“ I must go on anyway,” I said. “ I ought to be in Tuam to-night, many thanks to you.”

As I left the half-gloom of that place, where the men had been talking in tones that seemed low and modulated without any effort on their part to alter their ordinary manner of conversation, and stepped into the night, followed by the blessings of the Almighty God, I seemed to be moving from one kind of calm to another. It was some little time before I grew accustomed to the heavy darkness, and when I did so, and could see the faint glimmer of the road before me, my thoughts reverted to the cogitation of the midday.

Then suddenly I felt, rather than thought, the solution to my difficulty. Fear, of course, was a perception, but it was chiefly a reaction. And since fear was an insult and an impediment in the universe, fear was a wrong kind of reaction.

Surely that was so. To fear is to hand to the object of our fear a power over us, a power which it otherwise would lack. Indeed, fear is itself a provocation. A man clothed in absolute fearlessness—not defiance, for that is a kind of fear, but an entire absence of fear, a simple, unquestioning freedom from fear in all its forms—should be invulnerable. He could command the wildest of beasts, who are only driven to the frenzy that preludes attack by the waves of fear falling on them. Comradeship and simple faith should be the keys to universal safety ; they should annul the difference between right and wrong, with all the categories consequent on them, in a universal at-one-ment.

Fear, therefore, may only be considered as a perception

because it is almost the inevitable reaction from it in man's present state of unfaith. In a state of faith the reaction would be delight, a humbling and ecstatic delight.

I stood still, as I saw this, and gazed upon the earth swathed in the darkness of night. How sublime it was, how pure, how holy ! I stood erect, and stretched out my arms accepting the spirit that was abroad in gladness and joy ; it may be said, in a spirit of worship ; and, as I did so, every nerve in me thrilled and quivered with delight. There was fear in me too (for our words are ineffectual and clumsy labels), but it was not the fear that degraded oneself and the universe. Rather it was the fear that exalted and purified all things. I lost touch with my querulous personality, and rose into a personality that was a noble and magnificent thing. I became a part of the overflowing joy that is at the secret of wonder, being none the less myself because of that, but more truly and divinely myself.

The spirit that was abroad flowed through me in wave on wave, subjecting me entirely to itself, until at first I almost whinnied with speechless delight, and finally grew calm and subdued in a joy that was like a broad lake hushed in motionless reverie. The thrill of ecstasy that at first impelled me to leap and sing aloud, to dance, and chant the music of the dance, flowed into stiller waters that seemed to be the very essence of all song, of all music, even as harmony is the unheard inspirer of all harmonies.

The secret of all things seemed to be, not revealed to me, but mine, where I stood at the pivot on which they whirled. It was a moment such as does not often come to man, but, when it comes, makes him thereafter always a different man, a man with a secret sign upon his brow.

VI

I CONTINUE MY WANDERINGS

It was excellent luck that took me to Tuam just at that moment. Though I arrived late that night—too late to seek humbler quarters—the hotel in the central square was open and busily employed. Indeed it was with the utmost difficulty that I could persuade them to take me, and finally a sofa was put up into a small, bare room. There was already an occupant for this room, I was told, confined though it was, and it was much later before he came in to claim his bed. I was aroused out of sleep by being somewhat hilariously, but not discourteously, hailed, and I turned over to see a man sitting on the bed in his shirt, holding a candle-stick in his hand, that swayed uneasily and dripped tallow on to the bare boards.

I was asked if I would care to have a whiskey. I declined the invitation. I was then asked what it was I would care to have. I suggested that there would be no one to serve us, seeing it was about half-past one in the morning. This struck him as an original idea, and he proceeded to undress. Then, as I dozed off to sleep again, I was asked if I dealt in bullocks. I repudiated the suggestion, and said I was an ordinary traveller. I had some difficulty in explaining the full significance of this, whereupon I was asked what the hell I was doing in Tuam then.

It was a little trying, particularly as I had to settle myself to listen, full of sleep though I was, to a rather confused dissertation on the points of promise in heifers. But I bore with it equably, for my mind was too full of peace to be easily disturbed.

The following morning I was again aroused in the same manner. My companion sat on his bed quaintly swathed in blankets, with so puzzled and depressed an expression at my renewed refusal of a whiskey, with so pathetic a melancholy indeed, that I had no choice in the matter. It would have been ridiculous to spoil his day simply because I would not permit him to offer me a glass of whiskey. He grew wonderfully friendly, however, when I finally agreed, and we each sat in bed and toasted the other.

I was not long after him, however, and was much puzzled at seeing the streets deserted. No fair could I find wherever I sought, and at last returned to the hotel. There I was informed that the fair was held in a field some distance outside the city. This touched some slumbering memory in me, and as I walked out I remembered having once been told of this field, where fairs have been held without intermission since the days of the early Irish civilisation.

It moved me strangely. It took me back before the days when fairs were part of a monstrous commercialism. As I mixed among the eager bargainers it haunted me, and it haunted me all the following days as I walked my way northward. The blight that had taken England into its maw, the desolation of desolation that had written the number of its days over that land, had not fixed its peculiar power here. There was, be sure, poverty everywhere, acute poverty, and a ruin that had put its brand upon the landscape. Everywhere could be read the signs of a debauched repression, past and present, exercised on a fair nationality by an overlordism secure in its selfwill and vindictiveness. That was sure enough, and it was deadly enough. But it was deadly to the body of life, not to the spirit of life.

For example, the thing that now impressed me most was the poverty. In England I had never seen poverty but what it had implied degradation. Over this countryside poverty was universal, and such poverty as it would be hard to match, but degradation was so rare as to be negligible. That strange abhorrence of the presence of the poor in the vast slum areas of England—an abhorrence that prevailed with me despite my worthiest and noblest promptings to the contrary—did not prevail here. The sordid monotony of joyless labour; the degradation of work that was not work, that produced nothing, nothing but ugliness, and the opportunity of ostentation for the masters' womenkind; the disgusting fleshly passion that this broke into as a natural relief, and the drabness and horrible monotony of marriage when this passion has worn off, both posturing under the name of love; the stupid sentimentalities, demanding titillating books, the smug religiosities demanding a self-congratulatory ecclesiastical system, both of them revolts from monotony that ask their natural panders, and receive them, and so perpetuate them—

selves : all this, and the rest of the hideous system that boasts the name of civilisation with nothing whatsoever of civility about it, had at least not invaded my own people to whom I had returned. There was more aristocracy in many of these so-called peasants, in their mien, features, deliberate grace and balance of speech, in their reserve and half-contemptuous self-reliance, even in their occasionally brutal strength of will, than I had ever seen before. It was an aristocracy of instinct, not of a cult—and that is the only aristocracy.

There was not only the aristocracy of manners, there was also the aristocracy of letters. I first stumbled on this inadvertently. I had appealed for shelter one frosty night at a solitary cottage. It had been my intention to sleep out, but it had turned so cold that I found out the nearest cottage, at once to be offered the children's loft, above the cow-pen in the one living-room. As I warmed myself before the fire, I noticed the man of the house take up a book he had laid down at my entrance. When I drew him into conversation, I learnt that this was a collection of poems in the Irish. He recited me several, and recited them with a manifest joy in the value of sounds. Then he went on to recite me local variants of the same songs, and concluded by declaiming some of his own composition. I had not the Irish, and therefore I asked him if he would translate some of them for me.

"I haven't the ability to that," said he then, withdrawing again.

"It would be a good thing," I said. "Sure I might help you with the English."

It was long before he consented. At first our progress was slow, but this was chiefly a lack of confidence in himself, for he inevitably, though with grave courtesy, put aside the words I suggested to him, though he accepted their metrical order.

This aroused my curiosity, and often in the days that followed I discovered such men. Whereas, though the learning may not have been present, there was, nearly inevitably, a culture of idea and a quick eagerness to discuss conceptions worthy a man's thought. Yet it was not this so much as the upright assumption of intellectual rank that impressed me.

I could not help thinking of the England where to suggest

culture of thought was to be dubbed a bore, or to be tolerated with amusement as an artistic temperament. Once the train of thought had been suggested I found my mind continually running to comparisons. When, for instance, I noticed the sensitiveness of these people, the quickness with which they withdrew themselves into an invulnerable reserve at the least hint of an implied social inequality, their swift, and silent, if dangerous, anger at a breath of ridicule, I could not help thinking at once of the fatuous English complacency that is the laughing-stock of nations.

Often in London I had discussed (with Ramsay alone, and in his rooms with the usual company that assembled there fortnightly), the whole relation of modern civilisation to those nobler conceptions of Life that alone can save men from brutality and cynicism. And we had always come face to face with a certain inevitable twist back of the subject on itself. In all ranges of society it was the same. There was nowhere the remotest conception of Beauty, or if there was such a conception, it was soon smothered up by scorn, patronage, or amusement. The makers of "the greatest Empire the world has ever seen" have been men of commerce, men of hard gain, with the result that the whole edifice has been raised on a foundation of slums and practical serfdom, with an ostentatious flash of gold to its pinnacle. The middle classes, however, had neither the slums (though they had, and enjoyed, much of the serfdom), nor the flash of gold. They had neither the pinch of want nor the chance of adventure, and so they hired sentimentalists to write for them, and preachers to comfort them; they paid them, and paid them well, to give them the illusion of the golden glitter above their reach. With Want and the Desire for Ostentation, on the one hand and the other, the position seemed impregnable because it could so easily spring back to its earlier position. That was the hopelessness of it. Commerce had imposed its debased coinage everywhere. If the poor revolted, they revolted for tangible gains, not because their state was dishonour to the highest. That was called, always in the phrases of commerce, being practical. Yet wherein was it practical? Had they revolted for ideals, the ideals would always have remained, and they could have solidified the advantages they might have gained in the light of them. Their gaze being

forward they could have stood securely in the present. As it was, they were, commercially speaking, practical, and what was the result? Their leaders paid small heed to culture; they were remote from all the created Beauty of the world; consequently, as they were, by the fact of leadership, raised above their fellows, they became middle-class, with the middle-class sordid conception of getting-on. So other leaders had to be found, the work had once again to be renewed, and the lack of a conception of Beauty became the highest impracticability. Men ceased to be artists, and they became brute beasts or sordid machines. There was no conception of Beauty anywhere, and therefore there was nothing one could begin on. For the essence of utility is its final uselessness, and opportunism continues to be opportunism without proceeding to any good end.

And so, imperceptibly, against my stoutest wishes, I had, in common with many others, drifted into a cynical revolt against my fellows. But health began to flow into my veins as I walked these places where the blight of commerce, of gain for gain's sake, had scarcely entered; where, certainly, its accumulated cynicism had found no lodgment. I loved my fellows again. I rejoiced in their impracticability (to employ the cant term) because it meant something, and I gloried in their intractability because it was their way of showing that it meant something.

I loved my fellows. It was not till long after that I saw the significance of the change that had, healthily, quietly, come upon me. And it was this that caused me to receive into my soul the mystical companionship of hills and dreaming fields.

It was a holy pilgrimage to me, that walk up through Galway and Mayo. It was nothing effervescent. It was a deep, quiet, almost taciturn, joy. The hills and clouds, the strange bogs and standing lakes, bathed my soul; and there was nothing about men to put me out of tune with the great Being. One or two towns, to be sure, there were, in the north of Galway, that jangled the music again. Ordinarily I would have chosen to stay some time in such places, braving them, but now I admit I fled from them. I stayed long enough to strike upon the elemental in the people there as elsewhere. There was external squalor, but it had not meant spiritual degradation. Yet I

fled, nevertheless. For I did not want Problems, I wanted Joy.

I found it. The summer was well spent before I came upon a valley among the hills of Mayo, where a dishevelled, single-room cottage on a hillside served my turn. A new roof, repaired walls, a thick coating of tar on the inside, and a whitewash without, rendered it habitable, and did not unduly strain my purse.

VII

GLEANN-NA-SIOTHCHANA

I did not for some time realise the change that had been wrought in me by those days. When I had been settled in my cottage some time, Ramsay sent me a large parcel of letters that had accumulated. I dreaded opening them, and let them lie by for some weeks. At last I opened the parcel: but when I came to read through the letters they all seemed ridiculously remote and inconsequential.

Indeed, I had to stop, the task seemed so idle. But there were two from Rhoda, and these I read—as from across a tremendous distance. I could not have believed that they would have touched me so little. It was like prying into the correspondence of some other man.

The contents of them made this seem the stranger. The first in order of date preceded the other by nearly two months. It spoke of the receipt of my letters, declared her sorrow at the evident pain they expressed, and said that this had more than anything influenced her in withholding herself, as it would be much better that we both should be calm when next we met. I tried to recall the pain I had expressed, but it was like going into another lifetime, and hurt so acutely that I surrendered the attempt and resumed my quiet of mind.

The second letter was more urgent. She asked for news of me. She said :

" I hope you have got my first letter. I sent it to Marshams " (my publishers) " to forward to you in case you had left the flat. But I have not had a reply. Perhaps I did not give an address—did I ?

" I should be pleased to hear from you. I notice you have paid in a cheque to me, but haven't drawn out anything. I can't understand this. Will you let me know ? You know I feel this money is both of ours. Whatever money you made was both of ours, and the other must be so too in common fairness. I don't think this is just a duty. It is the proper way of things. You remember you yourself used to say so ; so draw for whatever you need, to oblige me."

She concluded with these words :

" We messed things in the past, and it has been a lesson to us. We are always one in God's sight, I know—and I am beginning to be glad to know—I miss you sometimes a good deal. Do you, I wonder, sometimes think of me ? Perhaps this separation will teach us both forbearance, and it may be desirable to resume our life again in the light of the lessons we have learned. What do you think ? I have been reading your letters again, and I ought to say I am sorry indeed for the pain I seem to have caused you.

" Believe me to be,

" Your loving wife,

" RHODA."

I supposed she had caused me pain, but all this seemed like a rumour from a different continent. The letter slipped from my hand on to my table, and I discovered myself presently watching a bare-legged woman come down the hill across the valley. It was impossible to say who it was, but the pink of her face and legs were caught by the evening sun, and her puce-coloured petticoat moved dully against the heather. To the right I could see the sun shining upon the heather on the crest of Neifin in the distance. It was all wonderful, it trembled with Life and Power ; and as I

turned to the letter on the table before me, it seemed threatening and strange by contrast.

The butcher came in, as I sat so, with my meat.

"It's late the way I am," he said, "and I've had a big travel to go."

"There's the hell of a lot of letters for you, Paddy," I said, kicking my leg towards them.

"Are them all letters?" he said, staring at them.

"They are so," I said.

"Then may the Lord God save me, but they're a rare lot. And you do be reading them all?"

"Till I got tired, and then I gave it up. Letters, Paddy, are the damnablest invention that the great wit of man struck on. Will you have some baccy?"

"Begging your pardon, I'll have some of my own. Your sort does burn the tongue."

So we sat and smoked, till he rose to go.

"Well, it's a nice place you've made yourself here, be sure indeed it is! A grand and decent place the way old Farrell wouldn't know the look of it. It should be a lonely place for a bachelor man, and if any time you'd come down to herself, it's no splendour of a cottage we have, but you'll be welcome, sir, very heartily welcome."

"I know that, Paddy. God bless you!"

"And may He bless you heartily, sir."

That evening I attempted to answer Rhoda, but the letter refused to be written. I sat for a long time facing it, but the blank sheet defied me in its shining whiteness. It was not that my being was numb: in fact, it had never been so alert and alive. But it was alive in another direction. I felt a duty called me, I knew that common humanity, not to say a more intimate relation, summoned me, but the function of my mind in that direction seemed to have gone.

Nor was I troubled. I was, in truth, quite peaceful. And when I rose, my task not yet begun, reached down my hat and swung down the valley, it seemed only as it should be.

I sought out an old man in the village with whom I had struck up a great friendship. It was a joy to hear him speak, even on the most commonplace topic. He was an artist in words. He created the most beautiful cadences, knowing them to be beautiful, and intending them to be beautiful. He

would revise his sentences as he spoke, going over them again with a more emphatic choice of words, and a deliberate excision of unessentials. This was so in what some might have deemed ordinary verbosity, and I used to watch him at work as he spoke, sometimes wholly losing the matter of his deliverance in the artistry that worked through the manner of his delivery. He was a widower and very infirm, so that he lived continually in an uncared-for, if not a positively wretched, state. I had given him a part of the turf I had had gathered for myself, so that he usually had a good fire. That was his only comfort in the world. Heaven knows how, and when, he got his meals. Yet when, as often he did, he came up to my cottage for a talk, it was with the utmost difficulty that I could persuade him to eat anything. He was as proud as a man could be, and of a delicacy that the wretchedest boor could not have trampled upon.

At first he had wished to speak on current politics, but he had treated them with so simple a faith in human goodness that the very conversation was painful. The slightest knowledge of the facts of the matter, the human elements swaying them, would have dispelled in a moment the premises of his discussion; and yet it would have been cruel to make him realise that men in power were not so disinterested as he himself was and wished others to be. So I had bent our conversations in other directions, and, to my inconceivable joy, I found him to be rich in knowledge of the poems and legends of the neighbourhood.

Thus we sat, that evening, and talked till near midnight. Two young men of the village were there as I entered, and to them, with that grave courtesy that always characterised him, he was discoursing of the glorious future that awaited Ireland in the good providence of God. I had never uttered a thought of my attitude to politics to him, save in a warm concurrence with his hopes for the land, but at my entrance he said at once, quietly and gravely:

"It should be a blessed thing to educate the mind of the young in the dispensations of God for this land that was once so great and good."

"We might draw them on us in that way," I suggested.

"We might so," he said. "The blessings of God are surely to be deserved by us, to the great admiration of the world, for

it would be a poor thing, and a discreditable thing, for them to pass away, and we unworthy of them."

I noticed his quiet answer to predestination as the conversation turned into other channels. He had been discoursing before, but now, after an intermittent conversation between us, he became a reciter, with certain interruptions by myself. As I walked slowly back up the road, through the heavy darkness of the night, I reflected that he was what would have been called an unpractical man, a talker, a dreamer. Some terms become laughable when seen in perspective. Walking up that mountain side in the heavy, starless, moonless night, with the last lights of the village disappearing in the darkness below me, one felt that there was a peace and power to be gained that the practical men are the first to miss. Martin O'Hara, however, had not missed them. He took them to slumber with him, and he brought them from slumber to the quiet business of his day. His mind was like an unruffled lake that reflects the clearness of the sky; and all the world's activity could not have put it in possession of that richness beyond price and purchase.

VIII

FRIENDS

The valley had been wisely named. Peace flowed through it like an unhasting river. And there was a feeling of such power everywhere, that I, who in cities had grown out of childhood into maturity, began to feel like a child again. My ignorance of all that mattered, my folly, oppressed me so that I began to feel like a child might when the company of its elders looks upon it, with the addition of a more acute self-consciousness. I was awkward, and yet it was without

discomfort. If I felt like an infant in a strange company, I knew that the company was purifying and enriching. One needed to be disciplined and tutored to be fit for that place, but the place extended its welcome.

My cottage lay up on the hillside beyond the limit of the road. A mountain rose behind me, and another before me, while through the valley, like a fluttering pale ribbon, the road wound its way between them. The curve of the road, and the further curve of a rough path to my house, hid the village from my sight behind the curving mountain side. Thus there were usually none to observe me as I used to steal timidly out sometimes of a morning to the Earth whose motherhood I was learning so late in the day. There was a quiet dell in the hill behind me, in a place of long, rough heather, where there was no pasturage, and consequently where the foot of men never trod ; and there I would take all my clothes from off me, and in my nakedness run and leap upon her bosom. A wildness, a maddening ecstasy would seize me at such times, till I would throw myself on the heather, and, rolling in it, laugh and sing aloud in glee, the winds sweeping my voice off my lips into a silence that came back like a clear answer. After such occasions, when I returned to the cottage, everything seemed more significant to me. I would stand at my window looking at the mountain opposite for hours at a time, as though it were more than mountain, as though the purple and rust of the heather, the dark-green patches of grass, the dull masses of rock, the silver stream that sometimes gleamed down a fissure in its side, were all infused with some inner glow that transmuted them and hypnotised me. There was a new lyric in the song of birds, there was a new voice in the wind. There seemed to be a pale aura, sometimes of violet, sometimes of a strange colour like golden-green, rising from the earth and clothing it gently over. The strangeness of this would pass with time, but the permanent possession it left me with could not pass.

Sometimes, as though a voice bade me, I would steal out of a night and climb to the summit of the mountain, and sit there till the early dawn crept into the upper air. I began after some time to be quite adept in making my way over the boggy rough ground that at first tripped me, as though I had developed a new instinct. What passed at such times I

cannot clearly tell. It is not only that such things defy words, but that the great influences of the universe are known in their effect, not in themselves. The effect on me was full of wonder. I felt my being grow and expand, like a flower unfolding. I felt quite certain of some things that had long puzzled me. I no longer wondered about the higher Presences that flood through the universe; I knew them, I had come into touch with them, and they with me.

Moreover, I knew another thing, a thing that I was richly glad to know, that I was, beyond all expression, thrilled to know. Growth is not altogether an unconscious thing. Sometimes it may watch itself, or rather, realise itself in a tingling consciousness of coming power and benignity. So I needed none to tell me that the very fashion of my face was altering; that my glance was changing from one kind of self-assurance to another; that my mouth, cheeks and forehead were not so much changing their contour as throwing off a different expression that seemed to suggest another contour. Some would have said that I had changed, but it was not my body that had changed—as yet. When they said in the village that I was looking better presently, or that I had surely a great contentment, God bless me, or that I was altering to the very image of the great poets and prophets of the times gone by, I knew; I knew what they meant. And I would go up on the mountain in meekness and gladness, and give thanks.

It was only Martin that divined what had happened. Or possibly it was only Martin who gave me any hint that he had divined. I had seen him look quickly at me once or twice, and I had guessed that that look meant recognition. I felt in his manner that he knew, though he said nothing. It was almost as if we saluted one another in a new world, where speech was not necessary. But one day when I had come down from the hills, and brought him the loan of a book I had promised, in the midst of his rather absent-minded conversation he quietly said:

“Did you go on Guala to-day?”

“I did, Martin,” I said.

“There are some things that may be known on Guala more than may be found in the wisdom of the world’s great writings.”

“Yes, Martin, that is so.”

“So there are. And a man may show on his face more

things than may be put into big books, if he comes into a quiet glen like this to find what may be found, so he may."

That was all. We began then to speak of other things—of the book I had brought him, and such subjects as that suggested—but there was new kindness in his attitude toward me that made me feel like a lad again: he from his seventy years to my forty odd.

So time flowed by. Mists began to creep lightly over the rusty heather. And then the great South-West awoke, and roared through the valley. The same bend of the hill that hid me from the village, protected me from the full blast of its power, yet my cottage was the object of at least two cross-currents that swept round to search it out. When I stood upon Guala and opened my arms to the flying revelry of its power, a new secret exultation came into my life. If it came laden with long whips of rain that stung as they lashed the face, I put on the barest clothes, and laughed in the face of that tumult of waters. Times there were, however, as the year grew forward, when I was not admitted to the revelry. My strength was not sufficient to sustain it. Even could I have stood on the hill, and not have been swept away, I could not have breathed, and my cheek would have been laid open by the hail and rain that tore the air. I had endeavoured it, but soon had had man's limitations demonstrated to me.

Then one morning as I awoke, I had the first drowsiness cleaned wondrously out of my mind by the sudden sight of the hills standing up in the whiteness of the night's snow. It transfigured me. I believe I cried suddenly out in an ecstasy that was almost a pain. It was not long before I was out on Guala. No expression of language could tell my mood then. I worshipped Beauty with an unutterable longing to know more truly what it was, and my worship was scarcely tolerable, a nostalgia that made my body sick with the efforts my soul made to escape from it. The east wind was scarcely perceptible as it struck me keenly.

Then spring came on, not in any pomp or wonder, for there were no trees or shrubs in Gleann-na-Siothchana to display its qualities of wonder, but in a soft graciousness. The gaunt valley seemed gently to thrill and softly to change as spring took its road coming from the south. That was all. And summer flowed up as inauspiciously.

Seeing that I would not be withdrawn from the valley by any seduction, both Tim and Ramsay came to see me in the summer. I also asked Frank if he would come, and he answered saying he would be very glad to do so. I shuddered to think what we should do with one another during the week of his proposed stay. He would, of course, think that I had taken a final leave of my wits, and I would be irritated beyond endurance. But I had come to think more kindly of men, and I did not wish my own brother to be estranged from me; or rather, I did not wish to be estranged from him, for he was willing to be on hearty terms with anyone who conceded him the reverence he wanted. And he really was a dear fellow. He wrote to me with astonishing regularity, and continually sent me cheques. When at first I did not cash them, he wrote me a letter of such pained expostulation that I could not but do as he wished. It shocked him considerably, I could see, that a brother of his should be living on two pounds a week, although I had all that I wanted. So I laid it all by in case of need, for I had resolved not to take moneys from Tim or Ramsay beyond the eight hundred or a thousand pounds that I estimated to be the value of my books. Moreover, I wanted to talk with him, although it was inevitable we should disagree. But in the end he wrote saying he could not possibly manage to get away, that all he would be able to manage was a long arranged fishing engagement in the Highlands of Scotland. This fishing was evidently a new notion of his: I had not heard of it before.

So my only visitors were Tim and Ramsay. Tim was the first to come, and the morning sun of a June day shone on the copper and grey of his head as he leaned out of the carriage to catch a first sight of me. It was good to see him again, and it was more than good to be lifted up by his warm love and enthusiasm, things that were given a distinctive quality by his quaintness. I had driven a car the twenty miles to Castlebar station to meet him, and as we drove back it was plain to me that his estimation of Ireland was very much set back by what he saw.

He had only a fortnight's respite from his desk, and during that time we went for many long walks over the hills. I introduced him to my friends in the village. At first they were all very dignified with him, from Paddy Egan, the butcher,

to Martin O'Hara. They did not understand his eagerness, his friendliness, and they either withdrew into dignity, or met him with a responding friendliness and cordial agreement that I knew was only another method of withdrawal. Tim did not notice it, but I did, and before a week was out I had managed inauspiciously to guide him into their acceptance. Then his irresponsibly affectionate soul, free from any kind of pretension, began to work its own influence with them. I could scarcely realise that he was now about fifty. I think he would have had as much difficulty as myself in realising so strange a fact. The grey did somewhat mingle with his younger red, and wrinkles had slowly begun to come round his eyes in a tougher and harder skin. He had also grown quieter, gentler, more timid, but in essentials he had not changed much. He never reminded me of the passing of time, but rather of its perpetuity ; and as we walked over the hills sat outside my cottage in the warmth of the sun, or joined in the passing household tasks, in an affection that nothing could have jarred, he always brought an atmosphere of continuance into our relation, as though there could be no term set to it in its constant pivoting upon itself. He might acquire an amazing inward knowledge of my books, and become a vociferous reader, but he did not grow thereby, he only deepened. Similarly he did not seem to bring any new element into my life. That, in my one room cottage, would have been quickly noticed. The day after he came it was almost as though he had always been there. I went out as before ; and if not so often alone, his company did not seem much of an intrusion. He was quiet and shy with Guala, but the hill did not reject him. So that when he had to go, it was a wrench that hurt both of us badly. On the platform he clung to my hand long, his eyes brimming with tears, and I was not much better.

That his visit had meant much to him I learnt when Ramsay came early in August. There was no leaning out of the train for Ramsay. Indeed, I almost thought he had decided to stay in Dublin for the later train, when he emerged deliberately, very grey, very shrewd and very cool.

"I thought maybe you wouldn't come by this train," I said as we shook hands. "The train hadn't stopped before Tim was out on the platform."

"Tim's a foolish and wire-strung boy, Jack," said Ramsay, "just as he was an old man when we first knew him. He ought to grow a beard, as we have done: that would steady him when he looked in the glass. Only he'd have to keep it trimmed."

"It is untrimmed a bit," I said, stroking mine.

Ramsay tuned me, as he had ever done. He was always like a plunge into a cold stream, and he became more so.

"Tim reports great things," he said when we sat in the car.

"Does he?" I asked, watching the mare's alert ears as we made our way out of the unaccustomed town.

"Indeed, yes. He says you are finding out what you have written about."

"Does he?" I exclaimed, turning on him, and almost putting the mare across the road. "I didn't think he had noticed that."

"Oh! Tim has got a wonderful faculty of observation under his power of assimilation. I only discovered it by accident. And I like your accent."

"You're fifteen per cent. greyer than you used to be. A year must make a lot of difference at your time of life."

"You'll need an older hand with that mare in a moment, my lad."

"Tut! Forty-two's the prime of life."

"For retiring from life."

"For retiring to life. You wait till you've seen."

Ramsay won his way with the people more quickly than Tim had done. His firm, erect dignity, his quiet assurance, his dignified and well-shaped figure, all helped to that end. But he was not so well received by Guala and his brother hills. It was not that they rejected him. That would have been unthinkable. But they were stiff and reserved, and it seemed to me that they were a little jealous, as they had not been of Tim. I could perceive the justice of it. Tim, by reason of his own unchangeableness, was simpler and purer of soul. Ramsay, despite his penetration of intellect, his quiet observation, his acute wisdom, was not so pure, and had wandered further from the primitive Powers from whom we have come, and to whom we must return. And Guala rang the coins on his counter with an unfailing ear for their tone.

At least, so I explained it to myself. For, though Ramsay himself was surely quite unaware of it, there was contention between him and the hills. When we sped over them in our long walks, it was the walk that caught Ramsay's mind, not the close, loving earth-intimacy. It was our talk, not the caress, so gently given, of the earth-presence, like a benediction on the soul. His mind seemed to me to shoot forward to head off my access to that unuttered communion, and often he was successful. I was unable, somehow, to get out alone; and sometimes I only succeeded in doing so by pretending I had to purchase something in the village, and by hurrying over and round on to Guala by the other side. At such times my approach was half apologetic.

This, I thought, was the counterpart in fact and reality of the conflict between what is called superstition and what is called reason. It was not an imaginary conflict, it was a close, tense issue between actual powers. It was the power of man's cold calculation, or heated and desperate reason, seeking to keep at bay the enormous powers (the powers, indeed, of his origin and destiny) that sought to overwhelm him and join him with them in their great purposes—to cause him a tense strain of spiritual living, in fact. Possibly this was one of the reasons why men herded in great cities, the better to wage the conflict and to escape its urgency.

I think sometimes it was this that caused Shakespeare's hand to grow slack. It was strange that his plays should begin to grow untidy, and then to fail in frequency, just when flowers and fields and the open heaven invaded them. Perhaps he found the answer to the questions he asked, each tragedy being a huge interrogation mark. Perhaps he saw the reverse of the coin: or was it the obverse? But some men grow so alert, so agile, that they cannot clearly see the answer before them to the questions they even then are asking. Quest becomes a habit that must continue for its own sake, although its object, or a clue to it, be actually found.

Perhaps it was so with Ramsay. Certainly I have found it difficult to understand him otherwise. We had both striven in the same direction (I, indeed, aided vastly by himself), and so it would seem that he would welcome my answer I had found. And I believe he would have—in a book. But in the presence of Being, of Beauty, of Power, his intellect

started working, and the answer that comes in vision was at once dispelled. The intellect is an instrument of analysis, and he was using it to its proper end. And so Reality was destroyed. Could he have had the presentation of that Reality in a book, his intellect would have had play, and he would have hailed it gladly. It was a strange thing to realise, but it convinced me the more that I was right where I was.

Having seen so much, I was on guard against him—and it seemed to me that Guala was at once more at ease. And I was enabled to give myself up to the enjoyment of his company the more freely : my citadel being well guarded. During the sultry evenings we smoked and talked on the hillside till the glow had gone from the western sky, and the butt-end of a declining moon was high above our heads. We took long walks despite the heat, and laughed along the roads. One day we walked to Loch Cam, and we swam there, and then ran upon the grass till we dried, while I told him that I had never seen so athletic a specimen of an old man in my life, and he told me not to be a cheeky youngster. He told me literary news, and I told him they did not interest me in the least degree, and told him village news instead. He told me I ought to be ashamed of myself as a literary man, and I told him that I was not a literary man, and had no wish to be. He replied that I must be, since a well-known critic had lately expressed the conviction that my "claims to be considered a man of letters were indisputable"; and we laughed loud and long.

We had our graver moments, and our cantankerous moments, but the month of his stay was a feast of gladness. It was strange that the thing between us should have raised its head on the last evening of his stay. We were sitting smoking on the hillside, and it seemed to me that Guala heard him attentively as he spoke.

"And when do you propose returning to civilisation?" he asked.

"Civilisation!"

"It's an odd name for it certainly. Culture, Jack?"

"My dear man! Can you name the match of Martin in literary London?"

"Do you really propose to remain steadfast here?"

"My dear, dear Ramsay, your brain is ossifying. That's the worst of old age. Why ever not?"

"You mustn't evade the conflict, young Jackie."

"I thought I was taking it up here as never before." And I told him what I took the conflict to mean, in the arena of the soul.

"That's for yourself. And what about the claims of others?"

"And must each man forsake the way of wisdom, having found it, because some of his fellows, in the coarseness and rapacity of their minds, have subjugated and made miserable others of his fellows? May that not be turning aside?"

"Dear chap, care for others is a part of Beauty."

"Dear old man, you are always right—even when you are only partly right. But I can't move from here till I see my next step clear, not even for a week."

IX

ETHNA CAHILL

Indeed, there seemed a general conspiracy about that time to withdraw me from Gleann-na-Siothchana. Frank wrote wondering when I intended resuming my "ordinary life." When I replied saying that I had resumed it he seemed offended for some reason, and wrote saying that I knew very well what he meant. Dear old Ramsay began sending me new books of authors whom I knew, which I put down to his stalwart kindness at first, soon, however, to perceive the quiet subtlety of it. Tim's laments over our separation also pulled in the same direction.

Moreover, Rhoda's continual letters troubled me. I had,

the previous year, at last written to her, briefly and courteously, chiefly in elucidation of the details of the disposal of her furniture. A desultory correspondence had ensued. She wished to know where I was, but beyond telling her that I had a cottage in Ireland I said no more, for I feared lest she should have come upon me. Only Frank, Ramsay and Tim knew. Ramsay and Tim she never approached, and Frank's mind guarded its secrets out of inveterate habit. Then she began to speak of the resumption of our marital life. She spoke of it as a religious duty that imposed a certain obligation upon her. That was scarcely encouraging for a beginning, and I could easily have defended my reluctance to meet the question on that ground. But that would have been scarcely frank, for, in the first place, it was only a method whereby she maintained her proper pride, and, in the second place, it was chiefly an accidental outgrowth from her new sentimental, falsely-religious creed. The objection was not in her, but in me. She had, by her own choice, left me, and rendered my access to her impossible. It was true I had suffered, and acutely, but since then I had travelled on a road that I must go back upon if I were to resume a life with Rhoda. And to go back so was simply unthinkable. It was strictly impossible.

There was the other side of the case ; for our companionship and unity in the past was a live thing. It not only had been, but it was, a live thing. It was just as impossible to revoke it as it was impossible to build a bridge over the chasm back to it. That was the shattering antinomy. There was no just resolution to it. Consequently her spasmodic letters as they spoke more and more openly of our "religious duty," troubled me. I feared for their arrival. They often lay about my room for a week before they were opened, and some of them no doubt got lost.

It might have been cruel, save that the inequality in our conditions adjusted that difference from a worldly point of view. Her letters came from excellent addresses in London, and from parts of Europe that I had once hungered to reach. With my new sensibilities I found it necessary often to lay them out on the heather to air, they were so heavy with perfume.

Yet it was impossible, and it became more so, for now I had taken up "The Robes of Wisdom" and was working at it.

I had had to cut away portions of it. It had been schemed to consist of four books, and I had progressed some way with the third, dealing with the mystical realisation of the Being beyond the limit of Man's body. This third book I had begun again. For that matter I was not best pleased with the earlier portions; but I never have been pleased with work done, and I have equally never been able to go over old ground. So I took it up where to do so was imperative, and I was working slowly, yet severely, at it, deepening my experience, as I wrote, with the artistic expression of it.

I could give a care to it that was not possible with my work before. The passage of the days did not mean a continually feverish rush. The wheels of life did not spin without gripping the metals, and I was able to stay at rest if I could not move forward: I could, in short, live, and not merely continue the automatic habit of existence. The pageant of the months, therefore, became a wonderful thing as it flowed past me. It was not a plumed and bannered pageant, such as forests and flowing valleys may show. It was imperceptible and delicate, subtle like the breath of gorse on the wind. The changes had come, and one was in full enjoyment of them before one knew they were coming. The cry of a plover, for instance, one morning as I awoke, brought over my mind the slow, amused knowledge that the autumn was indeed upon us; and in a sudden shift of the wind to the east, the morning's mantle of snow seemed a thing of wonder.

There was nothing that could weary my continued delight, for it was the delight of thriving. Ramsay's parcels of books ceased to be dangerous when I perceived their intention. They became a habit to him, and a pleasure to me. "The Robes of Wisdom" called up the whole energy of my mind, and by sedulously not looking backward, its very perplexities became an engagement and not a disappointment. Martin O'Hara helped me with it, unconsciously, for when I talked with him on some of the matters that were engaging my mind, I found that, though he had not thought them out, he had much of the experience. His words were seldom adequate symbols to his experience in their merely intellectual quality, but they had a richly significant emotional value that continually meant more to me.

So three years passed by. I had, contrary to my usual

practice, kept my book by me for some time, but I had now decided to have it published. The publisher of my earlier books had amalgamated with another firm, and when I wrote to the new firm on the subject, they replied saying that my books had not appeared to be paying propositions, to which had to be added the fact that the name of Jacob Elthorne as an author was mostly forgotten, but would I send them the manuscript? Their statements were indisputable, and I did not reply to them. I determined to take my book up with me to a Dublin house.

It was strange to leave Gleann-an-Siothchana for even a short time, and it was strange to feel the wash of humanity round me again walking up O'Connell Street and Grafton Street. The publisher I had called to see, I had learnt, was away for that day, and in the very strangeness of feeling this tide flow round about me, I had walked up through to St. Stephen's Green, dragging my bag with me. Then I took the tram to the house of the excellent matron who had housed me when last I had been in Dublin.

I had determined to stay a day or so in order to see several of those whose acquaintance I had made during my earlier stay, and with whom I had corresponded while at Gleann-an-Siothchana; but my quiet delight was not a thing to be rudely marred, and during the whole of that first day I made no effort to speak to anyone, taking my quiet joy to its full.

In the evening I sat in a restaurant in the same spirit of quiet joy, watching the people. Singly not one of them had the distinction, either in pure, rough strength or in spirituality, of those that I knew under the brow of Guala, but in the mass they were interesting in a wholly new way. They were not so much separate beings as separate expressions of a Being greater than them all, that larger Being being the city of Dublin, part compounded of human elements, part of houses and part of atmosphere.

The room was a large one, and to the left of me in a recess sat a cluster of girls fingering string instruments and chatting together. Presently one of them—who seemed the youngest of them all, and who had been sitting apart looking vacantly across the room over the heads of the people—arose, and at that signal all of them took their places and dog-eared their music. I do not know what it was they played, but I do

very vividly recall the figure of that girl as they played it. Her chin had seemed like a delicate angle blunted and turned over, before ; but now, pressed down upon the violin, as it was, the lines of her jaw seemed the very essence of determined pugnacity. Her hair, swinging about in loose wisps, seemed like a flaming red that had not quite resolved to be free of the gentler yellow. Her blue eyes, though deep of colour, seemed hard as her gaze was fixed intently on her music. I had scarcely noticed her before, but she seemed transformed now as she attacked the piece she played ; she stood markedly out. So far as I recollect, the piece was not a difficult one. At least, I know well it would not have been made difficult in any other such place. But she attacked it with all the fire of her being, seeming to make it resound with the energy she upcalled. I very well remember how the 'cellist and second violinist, seated each side of her as she stood, glanced up at her now and then, quickly, and with pained protest.

While they had played—or rather, while she had played, and her companions had lagged reluctantly in her rear—the room had continued to ring with laughter and its customary chatter, and when they ceased, the chatter sped on negligently. It was added to, from the alcove where they sat, by the musicians themselves, save that astonishing girl, who sat staring with puckered brows at the music she had just played.

I stepped over to her and asked her to play something or other—Schubert's *Ave Maria* I think it was. She looked quickly at me, but made no reply. She said something to the 'cellist beside her, who presently searched through a pile of music. Curiously enough I do not remember the playing of it, maybe because of the strange thing that happened afterwards, maybe because it made me drunk with itself. But very soon she was playing again, not the whole company of them on this occasion, but just herself with an accompaniment. It was Gounod's rendering of the same hymn she played, but so curiously did she play it that it sounded strange and unfamiliar. Her touch was so delicate, her tone so breathless, that the melody seemed to fall back again into the *Preludium* from which Gounod had so rudely and unfairly extracted it. It was not a melody so much as an aroma round

the cadences of the *Preludium* as it surged gently to and fro over the keys. When she sat down I felt her looking at me, but I was in the knot of some dream, and did not pay any heed to her.

Presently I went over to her again. "Thank you," I said. "It was kind of you. But I should like to speak to you. When do you leave here?"

She looked up at me in surprise, and her lips pressed together pugnaciously.

"I can't meet you," she said, almost fiercely. Then she seemed to relent a little. "Can't you say it now?"

"Not very easily. It is about your music." I stood calmly looking at her, like one that was content to wait for what he wished.

She looked hard at me, and then her sight went over me. I suppose the very pronounced absence of the dandiacal about my appearance reassured her.

"It's leave I will in half an hour," she said briefly, and turned aside to ask for some music.

To clinch it at that I went straight out. I had acted on a curious impulse, and the impulse held as I took a turn around the streets to fill up the half-hour of waiting. Her combative figure, with chin fixed hard on her fiddle, making simple things difficult so as to search them throughout, was in my mind as I walked. I was almost as much amused as I was puzzled. And when I saw her come out of that restaurant, simply, even a little dully, dressed, her way of walking suggested the same combative spirit. She came straight up to me and said :

"Did you want to say anything?"

"We'll go to some restaurant first," I said, turning about and leaving her to follow at my side. It was strange the way her manner influenced me to its counterpart.

"You like music?" I said, when I had found such a place.

"I do not like it," she said. "I hate it."

"That's because you can't master it. If you could, you wouldn't be interested any more in it."

"I don't know anything about that," she said.

"Did you ever go to hear any of the big music at the concerts?" I asked.

Her big blue eyes as they fixed on me were eloquent.

"Yes," I said, "that's the devil. We none of us can do the things we want to: or rather, that we ought to have God's right to. I can't complain much now, I'm sure, but when I was younger, when it mattered, I could not then. It's not the not having the money; it's not being free where the soul's concerned."

"You're a very queer man," she said to me as the result of her deliberations.

I laughed at her, but checked my laughter when I saw her flush at it.

"You know of course that Gounod had only picked one of the strands out of Bach's *Preludium*, and called it his own tune?"

Her mystified look told me she did not.

"That accompaniment, you knew it was Bach's *Preludium*?"

"No, I did not." She seemed a little pitiful in her ignorance. It was as though she stretched out a hand, in a little of defiance, in more of perplexity, but altogether in a request to me not to assume too much. And yet all the time she was like one hungry for food.

I drew a paper out of my pocket and consulted it.

"There's a concert to-morrow," I said. "They are doing Beethoven's *D major Concerto*. We'll go to it."

Her lips pressed firmly together, as though to deny the almost painful hope that had come into her eyes.

"I can't go with you," she said, as if the idea were preposterous.

"Why can't you go with me?"

"I don't know you at all, and we never met till to-day."

"I know two, or at most three, people in the city of Dublin. If I don't chance to want to talk to them, I am going to have a lively time presently according to your code of right and fit in the matter, aren't I?"

"That is so, and I wouldn't be unsociable," she said, thinking it out.

"You gave me a pleasure to-day, and I want to return it to-morrow," I said. "That is all."

She lived in one of the turnings off Dorset Street, and as we went that way we discussed the matter. But it was not until I had taunted her with taking me to be a play-boy that she finally, and a little fiercely, resolved to come with me.

Her name was Ethna Cahill. Her parents had died some time ago, I gathered, in the County Cavan, and she had been given shelter by her aunt, who had married an Englishman, Hugh Walpole by name, a man over-disposed to his national beer. Bit by bit, and casually, I extracted this much from her. "Aunty Walpole" gave a steadiness to her income by taking in lodgers, and what with this, and "Hughie Walpole's" soaking and surliness, things were not very bright in the way of domestic life, it appeared.

"I can't even practice," she said, "and the lodgers not complain of it." Then she checked herself quickly. "But what am I telling you all this for? You've been searching me!"

"You're telling me," I said, "because it's good to tell one another things. Besides, I'm not a bit of a boy, my dear girl. I'm very sorry for you." I put my hand on her shoulder as I spoke. She quivered a little, then suddenly shook it off.

X

STILL ETHNA CAHILL

I knew she would be thrilled by the *Concerto*, and I was intensely anxious to see how she would show it. But I was surprised at the result. At the muted chords opening the *Larghetto* she quivered like an aspen. My arm touched hers as we sat, and I felt each chord tremble through her. The colour came into and fled from her face with the movements of the music, making it like a sunlit glade, with clouds passing in the sky between it and the sun. Her eyes were fixed on the bow of the solo-violinist as it moved up and down.

"Did you like it?" I asked, when we were outside.

She said nothing for a while, then : " If I could play like that ! " she wailed. " But then I can't," she added fiercely, " and I never will be able to, and I hate it, hate it."

" You want to play with the very best ? "

" It isn't only to play. It's to know what it means. There shouldn't be much difference playing in a shop or a hall like that if one only knew. But I don't know, Mr. Elthorne, and that's what makes me cry about it."

" I told you, Miss Cahill, that I was in the west of Ireland in a wee cottage by myself ? That's why I went there, to know. Only in a different way—and not so much a different way either, maybe."

" Yes," she weighed it reflectively, " that might do it perhaps, all alone with a fiddle. But then you couldn't go to things the like of this."

" That is the drawback. You can't dismiss the accumulated wisdom of the world, and I must take you to more such concerts."

" Oh no ! " she cried out in sudden alarm. " And I didn't mean to be asking, I didn't."

" Do you mind, Miss Cahill, if I point out faults ? "

" No," she said wonderingly.

" Then I'm going to say you ought to be franker. Oh ! I know my countrywomen, and how proud-strong you are. But if I'm frank with you, and you are frank with me, there's no question of asking or of favours. If you'll permit me to do so, we shall go to more concerts like this some time, and I'll send you some books. You ought to find yourself, anyhow. Bless us, there aren't many who bother about that, and those who do, ought to be helped, for it's the most exhausting kind of bother."

" There aren't many who think like that. But you're a queer man altogether."

Her pugnacious aloofness—that meant a disprizal of the things most valuable to her—began to reassert itself, and I found it impossible to make any headway with her. It was thus she protected herself against her impotence ; and to me it was infinitely pathetic. Pride was its efficient cause, but protection was the end it served. In a while she said :

" When are you going to see Auntie Walpole ? "

She had told me she had informed her aunt where she was

going that evening, and how it had come about. If I wished to assist her, as one passer may assist another, I would have to see an aunt in whom her interest was of the smallest, in a house that was continually irksome to her, and probably meet the Hughie Walpole whom she loathed. It was certainly queer, but, in her, delightful by reason of its proud straightforwardness. I told her that I would call the following evening. I did, in fact, suggest the morning, but that—being delicately burked, I gathered that her aunt was scarcely arrayed for the world's eye at that time of day.

When I did call the following evening she herself had not come in. I was sorry. I wished it had been later as a concession to her pride. Her aunt, however, was a quiet and dignified woman, of the decayed pretty type, and she was quite competent to steer the boat aright through the introductory rapids. Walpole was also in. He was a man who might once have been genial and hearty, but the finer edges had been rubbed off those qualities until they had lost their distinctive shape. The most marked distinction I could note between them was that she spoke of her niece as Ethna, with a full appreciation of the music of the word, while he called her Eth, with the shortest possible quantity to the vowel. That her manner demanded respect, while his asked slighting, was possibly only an outer demonstration of that inner difference.

When Ethna Cahill came in, Hughie Walpole went out, to the relief of everybody, except his wife, who followed his retreating form with an apprehensive eye.

"Do you know," she said immediately, as she entered, "I've been thinking about you? You had to walk home last night. Wasn't it selfish of me not to think of that? But then I wanted you so much to help me."

"It was a good walk. The moon was out, and the houses looked like a deserted city, especially round by the canal. There was no hurry for me to be stirring this morning."

At that reassurance she stared at me, and I thought she was about to continue her self-condemnation. I was mistaken; the matter was already remote in her mind, and she straightway launched on an enquiry that clearly showed how earnestly her thoughts had been ploughing to and fro across the themes of the previous evening's concert.

I stayed in Dublin a fortnight longer than I had originally intended, and saw Ethna Cahill most days. I had music-books sent her, and went through several of them with her. It was fascinating beyond conception of words to see her young, strong nature—so sensitive, so brusque, so impulsive to strike at a thing it saw, and so mortified when its stroke missed the aim—finding itself. It did not learn (I doubt if the human mind does truly ever learn), it discovered itself; and it was a wild and enthralling study to watch that self-discovery. It is so always, but with her it was particularly so, if only because her fierce yet delicate strength needed such careful handling, since it could so easily turn and wound itself.

It meant that I raided my small capital, but that was part of the splendid adventure. Nothing else seemed worth while beside the joint effort we two made that she should burst through to the fields where her being might play in power. In helping her I helped myself. All those wonderful months beneath the discipline of Guala seemed to take new point and moment as they were bent to human service. The deep and quiet delight that had reigned there seemed to become active in this new human sphere.

When I returned to Gleann-na-Siothchana, it is true I felt a certain restraint, a discomfort even. The presence of Ethna Cahill seemed to follow me, drawing me back. Her struggling, perplexed soul appealed to me with infinite pathos, and dislodged the fulness of peace—a change that Guala was quick to detect. And yet I am persuaded that it was not the selfish antinomy that provides the external perplexity of living, that haunted me now; not so much that, as the contest between the purer power of Guala and the impure, conglomerate power of Dublin making my soul its battlefield, the majesty of purity against the uncouth majesty of Citydom.

Moreover, there was a letter from Rhoda awaiting me, as I remember, that I pushed away unopened for later attention.

XI

A DISCOVERY

In a month or so my book appeared, and after another month the reviews came along. I might have expected the result, but I was bitterly disappointed notwithstanding. During the time of my withdrawal, apparently, the reviewers who had grown up with me, and whose cavalier indifference to their own generation I had won round to a kind of beneficent toleration by the mere fact of producing books, had passed on from the work of reviewing, and a new generation, who also regarded reviewing as a temporary and inevitable task, had taken its place. This generation did not know my earlier books. How should it? And even if it did, it did not know the spiritual development implied in them. Consequently "The Robes of Wisdom" produced a sharp and sudden cleavage. On the one hand I was dismissed shortly as either, at best, a harmless mystagogue, or, at worst, a driveller, but, in either case, as a man who could not think (whatever might have been the quaint thing they meant by that), and who therefore strung words together, eloquent or ineloquent, that meant no more than the satisfaction of my itch for authorship. On the other hand, in the rarer instances, I fell among coterie-mongers. These saw in the book what I am very sure never had been considered by me. They put upon me thoughts that produced the most absolute despair in me, and they praised me for them. "Interesting speculations," "daring personifications," were some of their epithets, whose only merit was that they lacked the insolent sting of those employed by the former group. But nowhere, not in the insolence nor in the coterie-mongering, not in the curt dismissals nor in the misconceiving praise, did anyone seem to discriminate that, rightly or wrongly, with all the earnestness of my being I had tried to make a contribution towards the settlement of the huge problem of living. Some critics even blamed the book as being "remote from Life"; by which, I take it, they meant remote from slums and debauchery and brutality, that being their notable conception of Life, spelled in capitals.

Life is not merely living; Life is right living, in the mind and the body. Ugliness is not Life; it is Death.

Ramsay wrote to me that I must not be depressed by criticism, since criticism had never yet been right, not in a single instance, in its judgment of contemporaries. Which is of course true: history attests it. But to one who feels he has something to say of moment to his fellows, that is an inadequate consolation. My very effort only to say that which I felt to be of moment made my bitterness the acuter. The life of men in great cities impinged on me in my solitude by its very refusal of me. I fell into a dejection that lasted long, and for which there seemed no mitigation.

The chief thing that roused me was Ethna Cahill's letters. I had sent her a copy of the book, and she had not answered by thanks, praise or censure. In her fierce, direct way, she enquired. I could imagine her perplexed reading of the book, for her letters were disjointed and, it would have seemed to one who had not met her, petulant. It was as though she felt there was something there she wished to possess, and she wished to tear its secret out. The very labour of reading it seemed too long: to have to peruse it twice, and yet again to scrutinise it, apparently seemed to her an indignity. She seemed angry with me, and yet determined to make use of me as by divine right. It was magnificent of her, and I determined to stint no labour, to consider nothing a cost, if I could in any way assist her.

It was thus I came to Dublin again. I had noticed in the papers that a certain opera company was to visit the city, and I wrote at once booking seats for both of us, writing also to her telling her what I had done.

Her reply was to make a stiff protest against the reception of favours, whereupon I wrote to her again saying that the tickets had been booked, and that I would expect her company. But, crossing my letter, the following morning there came another from her, in which she seemed completely to have forgotten her earlier letter. She accepted the fact simply and straightforwardly, and wrote asking me what books she might profitably get from the library so as to prepare her mind. She had travelled far in the twenty-four hours. It was her trick of personality, this speedy travel over the tracts of her mind. She had not yet commanded the whole of her various being to a unity, and so had to abide in different parts of it at different moments.

I must at that time have been very blind. When I arrived at Broadstone, I at once took my bag to Rathmines, and went round to the restaurant at which she played, taking the same seat I had sat in when first I had heard her play. She was playing as I did so, but when she saw me her cheeks flushed red, she swayed as she stood, and for something like four or five bars her bow lay listlessly on the strings while she stood with eyes fast closed. The second violinist looked up in alarm, but she shook herself roughly like a terrier coming out of water, and took her company of players through the remainder of that piece at a pace that taxed them as much as it puzzled them. Yet I saw nothing in it beyond her natural bewilderment at finding one whom she least expected to see. I felt tender over her as though I had played an unfair practical joke upon her.

I was waiting outside when she came up to me. She gripped my arm tensely as she spoke.

"I did not know you had come to Dublin again," she said.

"I ought to have told you. I'm afraid I played a bad joke on you. I'm very sorry, my dear girl."

She opened her eyes wide and looked at me. Then she removed her hand and shook herself again.

"When was it you came up?"

"This very afternoon. I'll come round to pay my respects to your aunt, if I may."

"Surely!" she said. "There'll be supper there too. Unless"—and she broke away again—"you've got anything else to do."

"I shall certainly have supper there, if your aunt will put up with me," I said, brushing past her prideful defiance. "I have a lot I want to talk to you about too."

With a simple directness and forceful admiration that was quite remarkable, she produced before me, when we had passed through the introductions with her aunt, very nearly the whole list of my books.

"But my dear girl," I protested, "I would have given them to you gladly if I had thought you wanted them."

"Wanted them! And what way would I always bother you when I know right well I can afford them just as well as you can?"

"You mustn't go making a Protestant of her, Mr. Elthorne," said her aunt, less in humour than in earnest.

"No," said Ethna Cahill, suddenly checked. "He won't do that. But I must know. And it's awfully good to take all this bother over me. I know well it is, although I may sometimes seem queer to you. But you won't mind that, will you?" To my amazement her eyes were full of tears as she spoke, and she seemed wonderfully appealing and humble.

I felt a furious desire to take her half-outstretched hand and stroke it, she seemed suddenly so frail a frame to contain her energetic spirit. Instead of which I quietly brushed aside her appeal.

"My dear girl, you mustn't talk like that to me. How haven't you your right to make what use you will of me? What other use are any of us in this world than to help one another forward in the things that really matter?—assuming there is a mutual interest in those things. But now I want to know how you are going to manage about the time for the opera."

"Oh! I'm arranging that," she said, briskly and firmly once more. "I saw the directors, and told them it was for the sake of my music, and they're letting me go half an hour early all next week."

"But do directors of that kind care a bit for your music, beyond waltz-music while their scones are being eaten?"

"I don't know," she said, "but they did for me." And I could suddenly see her energetic demand, so full of importance, of those peaceable business men, and their puzzled comments on her afterwards, when they had granted her request scarcely knowing what they did.

For her twenty-five years she was the completest child I have ever met. Or rather, since we speak of children idly, not knowing what we mean by the term, she was the most original soul I have ever met. She was not ignorant of the cruder facts of life, I was surprised to find. There had been trampers in the house of her sex, I learnt later, who had been sent swiftly to the rightabout with a complete knowledge of their intentions. Her aunt's lodging-house had revealed some of the seamier aspects of living to her, which she had looked on with unflinching and knowledgeable eyes. But her

courage had not been daunted, and that is to say her quick impulse and her frank wonder had remained unsoiled. In a sense she was younger than her years—in the sense that she had not become spuriously old, but like all those people whom one considers younger than their years, she was also much older than them. She commanded her seniors with no other expectation than obedience, and usually she met obedience, though she also met, and never noticed, surly interrogation.

All the following week her delight in the opera was almost pathetic to watch. It would have been pathetic had it not been so absorbing. What might pedantically be called the philosophical conceptions behind the music, won her immediate attention, and the music itself became a kind of approach, complete or incomplete, towards them. We learnt together richly. We went twice to see *Tristan and Isolde*, for she had been puzzled and depressed after the first time. Then during the performance of the first act, on our second visit, she whispered to me :

“ But this isn’t love.”

“ Ah ! ” I exclaimed. “ Why isn’t it ? ”

“ Love fills the mind with blood,” she said, and trembled as she spoke, “ but all the blood has been burnt out of this. Love’s just as terrible, but it’s a different kind of terribleness. This is too dry—scorching, that’s the word—it’s unhealthy. But you know : what is it ? ”

“ Listen : where’s the burden of the music carried ? ”

She listened. “ On the ‘cellos,” she said.

“ Now,” I said, and took her hand, “ listen to the register, and see if you notice anything.”

“ It isn’t really ‘cello register at all,” she said slowly, “ it’s too high.”

A number of voices bade our silence at this, and despite her impatience, I would not continue till the end of the act, when I said :

“ That was Wagner’s musical expression of the fact that the fire had burnt all the sap out of the emotion. It’s dry, hard, in a sense arid.”

“ It isn’t love,” she declared emphatically. “ Love burns too, it burns up, but it fills up. This doesn’t fill up at all, do you know ? It empties. They are just cinders now.”

She sat facing me with her large deep-blue eyes flashing keenly, and a flush lighting along the pellucidness of her complexion. Her red hair was roughened where she had laid hold of it during the continuance of the music. I thought as I looked on her what a terrible and wonderful being this would be if she loved. It would, I divined, be no dry fire, but rather a mighty torrent. Again I had a sudden conception of her body's frailty under the possible stress exerted upon her spirit. I put my hand half protectingly on her arm, and she shook it roughly off and took up her programme.

Still I did not see the drift of things. She, I am sure, did not, for her nature went forward directly and instinctively, far ahead of her realisation of herself, if indeed her realisation of herself ever caught up with the urgent and trustful drive of her being.

It was not until the actual hour of my departure that the consciousness of things swept like a flame round us both. The glory of those evenings had passed, and lived in our memories now like aromas housed in a careful shrine. We were, each of us, both elated and melancholy. Through fitful sunshine the driving rain sailed across the open mouth of Broadstone station as we stood on the platform beside the waiting train. There were few travellers, and the porters had most of them escaped outside, so that the appearance of outward things was scarcely exhilarating. And we were depressed at the thought of parting, though a strange exultation burned through it all.

Then, as a shout came for all to take their places, I took her hand to say good-bye.

"I may any time come up suddenly," I added. "I feel the possibility in my blood."

I looked in her eyes as I spoke; they were fixed, large and earnest, upon me. Then I raised her hand and gently touched it with my lips. As I lifted my head, I saw her face again, burning and eager. She was trembling from head to foot. Before I could know well what had happened, she had flung her arms about my neck, my arms were about her, and our lips had met in an exultant, triumphing kiss.

I came to myself to realise that the train had begun to move out of the station. Calling her name, I leapt into it hastily, and not till I was within did I realise that there was no

need for me to return by it. But it was too late to recall my decision, and as the train toiled away, I saw Ethna standing erect and motionless on the platform, burning, as it were, in a dream of glory.

For the first hour or so I had no thoughts but for that consummating picture. It absorbed me, thrilled me ; it sent chords of wonderful music through my soul. Then other thoughts came on, and I was caught in difficulties. Presently one cruel and devastating thought flashed through me. Did Ethna know I was married ? Had I ever told her ? For the soul of me I could not say. We had spoken of most things, it seemed, near to us both, and I was amazed to think how intimately we had indeed spoken together ; but I had not been in the habit of thinking of my legal bond, and it was quite likely I had not spoken of it. The torture of that was inexpressible, and I amazed the one other occupant of my carriage by leaping up with a loud cry of pain.

So my thoughts turned to Rhoda, and she suddenly came and stood between us. Not by the legal bond she held. Not by anything so merely categorical. But by a real and indisputable claim. For I saw her then as I had not seen her, or had occasion to think of her, since the days immediately prior to her leaving me, with all the mental conflict that they meant. I saw her as the one who had stood faithfully and loyally by me in my poverty and bitterest struggles. She held me by that ; and how that journey ended I do not know.

ACT V

AN EXPOSITION OF TRAGEDY

I

THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT RESOLUTION

The whole of my past rolled to my feet, and I stood on the crown of its accomplishments and failures to face the future. It was impossible to net it all in, and to take an action that would remain the completely right thing to do. There would always be some outstanding consideration to abrogate the rest. I neglect categorical considerations. That I was legally bound to Rhoda would matter greatly to Ethna, who was a Catholic ; but to me it was a difficulty not past solution. But I was married, in the more truly sacramental sense of marriage, both to Ethna and to Rhoda ; to Rhoda in the sacrament, the holy-sealing, of suffering, courage and loyalty, and to Ethna in the sacrament of a coeval love such as I had dreamed of but had never known, mutually fulfilling. And though they did not, to me then, really compare, though the disparity was wide, yet their counter claims remained. To which was added a whole host of other harassing perplexities.

Happily, for right or for wrong, some temporary fury of blood gives a lead to circumstances, or, in certain passes of life, a fastidiousness of brain might have us weighing abstractions uselessly for ever. It is action that gives the cue to action. When I got out of the train at Castlebar station my mind was challenging and defiant. I stood opposite Rhoda and defied her claims, though I did not dispute them.

So I went straightway to the post-office and sent a letter-card to Ethna. I have it here amongst other precious relics :

" My darling, do not forget, whatever else may happen, I am yours absolutely. The kiss on your lips this morning was the crown of my life. I am yours to bid go or bid stay. I am yours, my little one, to dispense. To bring a glance of pleasure to your face would recompense any consideration ; it tears me, tears me, to think I may ever pain you. And there is such a joy in service that I could never have believed till now. Your face and figure are before me now like a dream to follow. God bless you, God bless you, and God bless you."

That was my challenge flung down. That was the first thing I saw had to be done, and though I saw no more to be done, I did that one thing and left the rest to evolve itself.

It did so rapidly, for the following night I wrote at length to Rhoda telling her the brief of the circumstances, and asking her to complete her action by divorcing me. Divining that she would not agree to outwit the law, I told her that, on hearing from her, I would provide her with the circumstances on which she could base her charge of unfaithfulness. It was humiliating that one should be compelled to subterfuge in a matter that was clean and honourable from start to finish, but that was the compulsion laid upon one by a State finical in this regard, though quite sufficiently lax in the ordering of public morality.

Having carefully written the letter, I posted it in the village for the morrow's mail. There was nothing more possible to be done till I had a reply to it, so I went up and lay on Guala to learn patience.

It was a warm night in late summer, and there was a breathless hush on the earth. The silence that filled the valley, and flowed up over me, was something quite tangible as it was wondrously impressive. The glow that still flowed up from the west dimmed the lustre of the stars, quenching their restless activity, and so motion seemed banished with sound. Nothing could have been imagined more calculated to calm the spirit. And yet, beneath all the calm, there was the throb of a mighty being, like the muffled pulse of an engine

whose power lay sleeping now. Indeed, the very silence, the very calm, seemed created by that slumbering sense of power. It was not the absence of something, but the presence of something, quelling all things to a whisper of delight.

I was glad above all things that this presence could so unmistakably make itself known to me. It was what I wanted to approve the love I knew. I felt as if, were Ethna at my side, on Guala's great back, the sense of solitude would in no way be marred, that the presence would not eject her from itself, but would interpenetrate her as it did all else. I felt as though to think of her was not a detracting of the present moment, but that each, in the restful act of contemplation, became part of the other. She would have lain, as I did, full on her back, thrilled, as I was, and lost to all sense of time and place and the accidents of circumstance. I could have held her hand, and we could have gone, like children, naked into the presence of the Great Being.

It was strange how my very trouble helped this. Guala could conceivably have been jealous of a detracting influence, but that the sense of my trouble drew out a self-forgetting beneficence. I lay there richly blessed, while the hours of Time ran obliviously by outside that shrine of timeless power—asleep or awake I know not, nor did it very much matter—in the body or out of it—till the dawn flushed through the heavens and young-eyed day stood on the waking earth, glittering in his crystals of dew, and radiant in his shining garment of light.

Not till the sun had dipped over its zenith was I free to rise and go slowly back to my cottage. As I went back I was thrilled with joy and full of peace. I had, it seemed, been so thrilled as against a struggle. All that week a hush remained, within and without. I had resolved not to write to Ethna until I heard from Rhoda, but I was alarmed at having no letter from her. I was alarmed because I knew so precisely what it meant. Her whole being was flowing out in a joy that was her perfect contentment and self-effacement. I could even see the radiant light of her face as she went about her work. A flame had burned up in her, and though it burned steadily and contentedly, it did so only because it had consumed the whole of her. I was astonished to think how well I knew her. Letters were an irrelevance to that mood of

hers. What could letters to and fro avail with that kiss on her lips as fresh as though it had just been pressed ! I trembled for awe, trembled like a reed, when I thought of the pure fire of that nature to whom I had brought I knew not what.

I trembled the more when I received Rhoda's reply. It was five years since I had seen her, and I had no clear picture in my mind of what she might have grown ; but I received a distinct picture from that letter. Had she claimed the memory of the past, the pledge of our once loyal union and all that that had meant, I would have been silenced. But she did not. She claimed the fact of our marriage, she referred to that as though thereby I or she (it was not clear which) was to be tethered to the other, hindering and frustrating the other, through the countless ages of eternity whatever we would ; she spoke of the " sacred words breathed over us both," though she did not make it clear whether the sacredness lay with the unknown man who invented them or the matter-of-fact officer who compelled us to say them after him. It occurred to me at once as an argument to take up with her that we had only been mated in a registry office, which would, I imagined, undermine her attitude ; but it was monstrous that I should be compelled to juggle with such irrelevancies. There was only one sacrament, and that I admitted ; and that she did not claim—indeed, our whole attitude, the very fact of our separation, was an abrogation of it. That it did not wholly abrogate, I knew in my blood, but that it seemed to have been abrogated for her, I saw from her letter.

It needed all my strength to read that letter, for it sent a fever into my bones. It put a barrier effectually across my path. That her emotions had been touched, I saw ; and the part of the letter where that peeped through moved me considerably. Had the whole letter been thus, or had she appealed on the basis of it, I must needs have been exceedingly tender in my attitude. Love is always a thing for very tender handling. But she professed horror—oh, how can I write of it ? How can I treat of one who spoke of a thing that seemingly did not exist ?—who spoke of that seeming non-existent thing as though its denial was a kind of horrific sacrilege ? Horror, because I loved Ethna ? The free winds that blew among the heather laughed at the notion as a monstrosity. If ever there were love that was pure, free of

the flesh (if need were : though the flesh is no thing to fear) and untainted, then my love for Ethna was such a thing. While hers for me went without saying. One had only to know her to judge of that.

It was a wild, wild night I spent with that letter, striding the hills, and lamenting in my cottage. The following day brought little remission ; but it brought me this knowledge, that I would have to see Ethna forthwith, and, however much I feared it, to see Rhoda also.

II

THE INTRODUCTORY ISSUE

There was one thing I had not taken into my calculations. I realised it as I sat in a corner of that restaurant and heard Ethna, across the bustle and clatter of plates, abandon herself to her violin. She was playing the *Preislied*. I was reminded of an evening only a fortnight before when we had heard it together, and discussed its formless irresponsibility. This she was now interpreting so quaintly that the air, if air it may be called, seemed to float about the room in bondage to no instrumentation or technique. It became thus, in a manner, deeply expressive of herself ; but as I heard it I realised that, like a number of lovely, untamed souls in our country, she owed fealty to a bondage that was not expressive of her, but held her nevertheless.

When she saw me standing outside she came up to me happily, even as though she had been expecting me, and slipped her arm within my own, stepping gladly up the street.

"Do you know I was wondering when I should see you ? " she said.

I looked down at her face that was lifted up towards me and shone radiantly in the heavy dusk. How pure she was! Love had taken her impetuous, perplexed being and burned the whole of it to a crystal clearness. I was greatly afraid for her, and turned away the thought that the coming ordeal was necessary to exalt her possibly, inasmuch as it savoured of hateful unkindness to her and complacency towards myself.

"Dear little woman, how I have lived in the perfection of that sudden kiss!"

We had not renewed it. It seemed almost like making sacramental things a common usage. But our eyes held each other. We caressed in our glances, or our souls did, and we thrilled richly in the joy of it.

"Let us go somewhere by ourselves and talk, Ethna," I said.

"Jack!" It was her first speaking of my name, and she said it softly, as an assent.

It had been my intention to ask her if she had said anything to her aunt, but as I had looked in her eyes I had known that question unnecessary. I could almost have heard her softly derisive "Auntie Walpole?" No, it was plain she had not wished to mar her joy by uncovering the secrecy, and as we went in to a hotel off Dame Street I knew that our tribulation was to be in a universe we owned for ourselves.

I felt as raw and nervous as any lad at the prospect of breaking my news to this dear girl, and shattering the clear wonder of her joy. She noticed it. Indeed, it was her smiling glances of question at me that brought me to the threshold of my statement.

"Dear," said I, putting my hand over hers on the table, "I told you most things about myself, I believe: I hardly know what I did tell you, and what I did not: but did I, among other things, ever tell you that I have been married?"

"You did not," she said slowly. It was plain that the brightness of her joy had been dimmed, but it was equally plain that she had not come to the notion of my wife being then alive.

"I never thought of myself in that relation," I said, breaking the fact to her gently. "I gave you all my glance took in, but it never took that fact in its widest sweep, for she left me years ago and I have grown another man since. I was

ripe for the change then, and it has developed busily in the five years since, so that I have had no cause in my developing nature to entertain the other relation. Otherwise you would have heard of it with all the rest of my proper concerns that came naturally out before you. And then, to me at least, the knowledge of our love swept so suddenly out of the sky upon us. It was not until I got away that the other thing suddenly came before me. I have not slept for nights. I have been so much to blame."

With words I sought to muffle the blow for us both. I sought to deaden it, but it had fallen notwithstanding. Ethna's face had grown white and haggard, and her eyes staring beyond me across the room were old with pain. The happy joy had been stricken away, and the tense agony in that face as I looked at it nearly made me cry aloud and to tell her it was all a ghastly joke, that I was not, nor ever had been, married. The waiter came and placed something before us, but I pushed it away and told him in the name of God not to interfere with us.

Time flowed by, and there was still no change or move in her. It was intolerable, to look on that white, staring face, to see that anguish of soul as its fair and beautiful citadel crumbled slowly before it, and to know that it was my hand had struck the blow.

Anything was better than that mute, suffering glance, and I spoke to her. "You would be just to be angry with me, my dearest," I said, "but don't continue in silence so. It is too terrible."

She turned her eyes on me, and for a moment it seemed as though she meant to be angry. Her being seemed to draw up to strike and adjust her wrong—strike me, strike anything; and had it brought her relief I would have endured her stroke gladly. But her glance changed, as it caught mine, to one that cried numbly.

"Oh, Jack, and I had been so—so happy!"

"Ethna!"

"Mine—I thought you were mine. In our own world I had lived all this time."

"And I am yours, Ethna."

"But you are married!" She spoke half wonderingly.

"So the law says. But I am not owned—except by

you. It is a complication of affairs, not of facts, this of ours."

She revived a little at this, but then she turned away again with a piteous gesture.

"I can't cheat myself; I can't cheat myself," she cried, then wildly struck the blow she had inclined to at first. "Oh, how I hate things! First my music, and then this! Why can't I own anything? Why can't I give up anything? Oh, Jack!" And she reached up her hand and fiercely took mine that I had outstretched across the table to her aid. The way she spoke my name made me know that she had breathed it often in the kingdom she had made for our possession.

I summoned my years to me for the will to guide us out of these poignant waters. She was bleeding opposite me, in an exquisite pain of spirit, and I could not suffer my self-blame to withhold my hand from the energy requisite for some measure of her relief. Else where was the virtue in my riper years? So I drew myself together.

"Ethna dear, does that kiss of ours remain, or does it not remain? Tell me that."

She looked suddenly round on me, and I held her eyes with mine. As I spoke on, the colour slowly crept back into her cheeks.

"It was a pledge, and it still is; and surely that's a great deal more than a formal bond lodged in a dusty archive." Even as I spoke Rhoda seemed to stand with another bond before me. But I put it aside. First things first, I said; Rhoda herself had cancelled that bond; and I continued earnestly: "What you are suffering now in your degree, I have suffered in my degree all this past week. We cannot either of us take the other's pain, or we would gladly, wouldn't we? But in the end of it all I see this clearly, that we have our love still as truly as ever we had, with the other's comfort added to it. I cannot believe in the purposelessness of things. If we lift our heads bravely in this we shall find its meaning. But in the meantime we each of us always have the other. I know that that's easier to hold by in fuller years, but, my Ethna, it is true. To-morrow I go to England, to-morrow morning by the mail, to see this lady who claims this bond so as to arrange its dissolution. I can't believe she will want the continuance of a mere paper-state——"

"Divorce!"

"Yes, dear, divorce." The thing I had seen afar struck us suddenly.

"But they won't let me marry a divorced man," she declared fiercely, almost contemptuously, with pride in every nerve of her; then suddenly she dissolved to a wild humility. "Oh, Jack, dear, I didn't mean that; I didn't mean that surely. I would, oh I would, have you anyway. You can't think how I have lived all the very whole of my life this week gone. I'm not all that hard Auntie Walpole is. But there'd surely be a great trouble; and—divorce is a terrible thing."

"I know well what you meant, little woman," I said. "You may just let your soul's word freely out. I shall understand; I know you, Ethna, and the rest is simple. Divorce frightens you, I know, that's because you've been trained to it; but what if divorce exists already in the soul? What then, my dear, of our one sealing kiss? Is the flesh more than the soul?" She was silent. Her whole body seemed to yearn eagerly towards me, and her face to reach forward to mine infinitely, though she moved not. "Let me tell you the story," I said, "and you shall judge how real that divorce is."

Simply I told her the story: quietly, and with a music of words so chosen that they should soothe her spirit quivering still. It would have been wanton brutality to have spoken to her of the early intimacies of my life with Rhoda, though they had a memory of loyalty that was not dead. I told that Rhoda had earnestly co-operated in certain ideals of life that to me were the whole meaning of life, which ideals she had abused, scoffing at me for holding them. From this I dated what I had to say. I said clearly that I did not blame Rhoda; that that would have been an impertinence, seeing she was one and I another soul; but that a divorce had ensued, a wrenching apart that had meant considerable pain to me, and doubtless therefore to her, and that, in the result, we now, in the deepest sense, had nothing to do with each other, had no traffic because we had no common medium of traffic. In short, that we were in fact divorced, and that any attempt to resume a mutual life under the circumstances would be an indecency, a prostitution. I was about to point out that there was only one possible claim she could have on me,

maintenance because of wasted years, and in that she had the advantage of me, when Ethna broke in :

" But weren't you wanting to know, like you've been helping me to get at things ? How could you go apart ? "

" She found success," I said.

Silence fell on us at this. Her trouble seemed held in suspense by an exquisite shyness that was more eloquent to me than the speaking of many words. Presently her eyes sought mine.

" I know that, Ethna," I said, " I have no doubt of that. Your art is an art to you, as mine is to me, and we can each help deepen the other. My dearest ! "

Then her brow puckered, and she hung between perplexity and the shyness that was so novel in her.

" But would they——? " she asked.

" My dear little love," I reassured her, " our union is a higher thing than needs the judgment of men's hands."

We had eaten nothing, but I paid our account to a sympathetic and understanding waiter. He and we, I dimly realised, were the only people in the room.

Outside, in the dark of her own street, Ethna suddenly took an alarm.

" Oh, what," she cried, " if she won't let you free ? " Her lips were pursed and the poise of her body challenging, as when she played her violin. Then terror struck her : her face became pale and haggard, and she clung to me wildly, trembling violently.

" We mustn't think of that," I declared. " We absolutely must not. It's impossible. I should go mad if I thought of that. Ethna, it shall be, I say it, and we shall go to Gleanna-Siothchana."

III

MY QUEST IN LONDON BEGINS

Not only Ramsay, but Tim himself, awaited me at his flat.

"I wasn't going to let the return of the recluse to the world pass by unnoticed," Ramsay declared. "I passed the telegram on. Half literary London will be here in a short time for your delectation."

"Since when have you taken to explicit humour, old Ramsay?" I asked.

"Someone must keep the balance level," he said in a tone whereby I knew at once that his quiet observation had already divined that something was amiss.

"I prefer our Ireland to this man's London," I said to Tim, who had heartily thrust me into a chair and lit his usually monstrous pipe.

"We Scottishmen do rather own it, I admit," said Ramsay, holding his match till it burnt his fingers for the greater deliberation of his remark. Then after the initial silence had passed off, and our pipes began to take their journeymen way, he added quietly: "Well, what is it?"

I told them in as few words as might be. I was in London for action, and it was not my intention to talk upon it by the way even to my dearest of friends. There was a long silence after I had spoken. Ramsay's face betrayed no hint of what he thought; Tim's was keen with pain as he stared ahead of him. Then Ramsay spoke.

"I don't approve of it," he said firmly.

"New presbyter is old priest writ large," I quoted to him. "I go to see Ermott Jacob to-morrow morning."

They both breathed sharply at my mention of that name. It pained me keenly to hurt my old friends with any appearance of harshness, although I knew that my morrow's interview, to have any satisfactory result, could only take one course. I was resolved to win, and I was faced by Rhoda's first refusal, her falling back on cant phrases.

"My friend, my dear and only friends outside my glen, don't think oddly of me. I can only fall back on the schoolboy phrase, and say, 'You don't know her or you'd know what I mean.' But you do know me, and I ask you to believe and

trust me." Half an hour before this I would not have believed I could have been pushed, with scarce a word spoken, to a defence. But those who have lived through an experience can never communicate that fact to others, and I had opposite me dear friends of mine who had not yet adjusted their mental outlook to this new conception of me.

I felt it about me as I set out the following morning to find out Rhoda ; but I had had a letter from Ethna, and that was working actively in my mind. It was my first letter from her, and that fact was eloquent. While she could dwell in her mind's possession of me, letters had been unnecessary, but now that that was assailed she cried wildly and fiercely for the assurance her eager soul demanded. Her various being had been suddenly knit to a unity by the kiss uprushing from both our needs ; but my news had disintegrated it again to its old contentious discussion. And she wailed for peace, for power upon herself. I would get daily letters, I knew, but this first of them made me strong, if desperate, for my interview.

Rhoda had a flat now near Sloane Square. The drawing-room into which I was shown by her maid was a resplendent affair. When she herself entered she came forward tentatively, interrogatively ; it was plain that she had not recognised me. I realised that I must have changed somewhat during these five years, but she, though she was thinner and, as it were, more convinced of manner, had remained the same. Was I unemotional that the sight of her should stir me so little ? Or was it that I had, in the quietude of Gleann-na-Siothchana, grown incredibly remote from her ? Or was it that my last experience of her in this elegance was of one who went her way paying small heed to me, and whose presence I had come scarcely to notice in those rare hours when we met ? I did not know ; I could not tell ; I only know these quick speculations ran through me as she scanned me, rather than any glow of emotion.

Then : " Jack ! " she exclaimed : and added, a little nervously, " I didn't recognise you at first. But I hadn't expected to see you, you see. I'm very glad you have come."

" I've changed much more than merely in physical appearance," I said awkwardly.

" Won't you sit down ? " she said, her nervousness mixing

with the manner of the accomplished hostess. I could not help but admire the ease with which one thing flowed over and dominated the other in an easy grace of manner. I admired it as one might admire a grace that one scarcely has wished to covet.

We sat, and an awkward silence might have fallen on us but for her.

"Have you been in London long?" she asked.

"I only arrived last night."

"I am glad you came to see me so soon."

It was simply and genuinely spoken. There was the out-reaching of a hand of tenderness in it that did not fail to discover me. I felt brutal indeed in refusing to accept it, but what would have been the use in proceeding thus?

"I came specially to see you," I said, "on the subject of my last letter to you."

"Oh," she said, stiff and alert. "I thought I wrote to you in answer. You got my letter?"

"Which meant an intolerable and impossible state of affairs—you to live your separate life, and I mine; we never to meet, but to pay a mock pledge to a paper bond that has ceased to mean anything. Surely you can see that that is an indecent contrivance!"

"I am willing that we should renew our married life." Her words were spoken coldly; but that, no doubt, was to cover the extreme awkwardness of her position.

"Do I understand you rightly? You know that my affection is given elsewhere—excuse me, but I was not to blame for the state of affairs that created that possibility!—and yet you desire the renewal of— You make me wonder where that pride is that once was so active in you. I spoke of a separate bondage being indecent: surely— Can't I appeal to you on nobler grounds?"

"It isn't a question of pride. It's a question of duty."

It was hard not to be impatient at this, but the point had to be met since it was plainly her citadel.

"Our duty lay in the past. We failed then: I, or you, or both of us, failed there, and the thing has gone away into the shades. What do you mean by duty? Would you play up to this duty? Look at me now, and conceive me in this elegant drawing-room full of your elegant friends! Does

that prospect please you? That kind of thing always irked me, as you know: I scorn it unutterably now. Who am I to scorn? you may ask. I admit the justice of that plea, but it only argues the futility of what you call this duty. Would you forswear all this for the duty of which you speak?"

"I would try it if you wished," she said.

"I hope you won't be offended if I suggest that you only put that up to outflank my case. Yet even if you did so, you would be bored to tears in a month, seeing the will has not proceeded from any real change of desire in you. Come and see my one-room cottage, and judge for yourself how widely we are separated! But the immediate matter is this, that I, who have lived my separate life for five years—since long before then, truly—have come upon one now whom I love, and who loves me; that is to say, one who fills up my life, as you do not wish to, and long ago elected not to. Therefore——"

"I suppose you consider that that's all a woman's for, to fill up a man's life, as you put it," her voice rang out. "It makes one tired, continually hearing that kind of thing."

"Attribute it to my male fatuity, if you will. It is truly only a subjective way of stating a double position, for I fill up her life too. That, I can firmly state, is the thing that most weighs with me. Both sides are necessary to what we can call love, and both sides are amply completed in this present instance as neither is between yourself and myself. You, with perfect justice, and even possibly with commendable taste, have no desire to fill up my life. I would sooner be laid on a dustheap than drift in this stream." I indicated the elegant room we sat within. "In short, I am divorced here, and lately have been married elsewhere. It is your duty to let that patent fact be registered in the noble archives of the State. I do not ask it for my sake, for it matters little to me what kind of registration the State elects to make of me. I ask it for the sake of this lady to whom it is a matter of concern."

"Have you been unfaithful to me?" she quickly asked.

"Yes," I lied. Whether she had in her mind my possible relations with Ethna, or the Divine-Law comedy, I do not know; but the thing had to be said at some time, as part of the idiot-game the law would compel us to play, and I might just as well begin it forthwith. As part of that comedy it lost its

character of a lie, and became a tragic game of Aunt Sally. I thought of adding that she first had been unfaithful, but I had said my say to that end, and would add no more.

She sat flushed and silent for a time ; then her mind veered about on a different vane, and she flashed out upon me :

" I'm surprised at you, Jack. A man of your ideals too ! I have always held in my mind that whatever else might happen you would be faithful to me. Where's the nobility in writing books that your life gives a lie too ? "

" It is you who must take the responsibility of that," I broke in.

" I ! " She rose before me as she spoke.

" Yes," I said, and rose too, " by selfishly enforcing a bond that has lost all validity——"

" I shall never consent ! "

" —selfishly, and, I believe, vindictively, although you were the first to turn your back on all that it should have meant."

Few things are accomplished in such ignoble anger as we then broke to, and bitter words were spoken that were the less edifying seeing this was our first meeting for five years. We were both shamefast at the end, each feeling injured with the other for the unworthy display. As I looked on her, she seemed then, in the white morning light, to look strangely thin and grey.

" Nothing can be done by this," I said, after we had fallen to a pained silence. " I ask you again, I implore you if you will, to liberate me, as you alone can cancel this meaningless thing that fetters my proper freedom——"

" I will never, never do it," she said, still angrily. Her pose suggested unflinching defiance. In that room it carried off its incomparable dignity, though it would have looked histrionic on hills.

IV

SHOWING HOW FRANK GAVE HIS ASSISTANCE

A pale, watery sun shed a meretricious beauty over the faint mists of Sloane Square as I stood there with the tragic years loaded upon me. I could not, I dared not, write to Ethna that I had failed. I drew her letter out of my pocket, and read it again. Each line in it was a cry, not an ordinary plaintive cry, but a thing that had tempests in it, almost fearful like the coming of a storm. They rang as though she had hold of life, our life, and impossible powers were tearing it from her hands. It was wild ; it was dumb too ; like a pain that passed beyond words. It is likely I cried aloud in my pain, as though Guala were by to help me. Then I thought for the first time of Frank, and I strode across to the station.

A pale youth, in a high white collar and silk tie, looking superciliously over me informed me that Mr. Elthorne was in and asked if I had an appointment with him. But I had seen Frank Elthorne's name on a doorway behind the youth's back, and stepping through the barrier I pushed him uncere- moniously aside and strode across.

"Who the devil——" said Frank starting out of his chair on seeing a stranger come in. Someone was with him, standing beside his desk, some head of department, presumably.

"You may go, sir," I said to him, and as he turned amusedly away, I turned to Frank: "I'm in trouble, Frank, and I think you can be of assistance to me."

"The backwoodsman!" he exclaimed. "But steady: you don't own the place. Well, how are you?"

He hung in balance between an assertion of dignity and a desire to be cordial. It was good to see him again. We were widely enough apart in all conscience, but it was right good to see Frank again. He was very stout and sleek and prosperous-looking. His clean-shaven cheek was full of good living without being unhealthily so, and gave an excellent top finish to his generally well-groomed appearance. He was very pleased with himself about something.

"I'm well. I could run you a mile anyway."

He could not refrain from criticism. "Don't you think you might have touched yourself up a bit for the City, even

though we do worship the devil here ? What, eh ? But never mind, I'm glad to see you. How are you ? Oh yes, what's the trouble ? " He positively brimmed with good humour.

" I want you to see Rhoda for me." He suddenly looked interested, but I held relentlessly on to dissipate his picture, although I again felt this awkwardness in speaking of Rhoda. " I have been to see her this morning, and she refuses absolutely to take steps to release me, although I have explained to her that we have no hold each on the other. I want now to marry."

" Marry, my dear man ? You marry ? But I beg pardon, go on ; who is it ? "

" A violinist in a Dublin tea-shop."

" I say, Jack ! " He looked doubtfully at me. " Oh," he laughed, " I suppose this is your sense of humour."

" Frank," I said, " it's more earnest a thing than you can conceive, or I can trust myself to explain. Will you just do as I ask you ? Go up, and see what you can do to get Rhoda to act reasonably ? Her attitude is pure jealousy, I believe. She doesn't explain, she is all apostrophes and stubbornness. We had shameless word-throwing this morning."

" I don't wonder she refuses," he said pensively. " She has just written a book on the sanctity of marriage. Sort of book you ought to write," he said, looking up at me, " it would bring you in pots of money. It did her a lot of good ; her sales were sagging horribly, I believe. Very good book, mind you ! But, you know, I don't think I could do much good. I don't see much of her, you see. Still, if you think it would do any good, I'll do what I can. It sounds an odd kind of business." He looked doubtfully at me again. " How old is she ? "

I caught the incongruous thought in his mind, and refused to parley with it on that basis. " I take it you couldn't go this afternoon ? " I asked.

" I don't think it would be wise if there was a scene this morning."

" No ; that's just. I must be calm. I feel nervous like a youngster over again. You see, I'm now thinking of Ethna ; she didn't know I was married till after we found ourselves in love with each other. And this present state will be cutting her to pieces, she is so acutely strung. She's a Catholic too."

"A Catholic, Jack! Isn't it an odd thing for an Elthorne to marry a Catholic? Still, there you are, it's your business. I'm sorry; I don't want to interfere. I'll go and see Rhoda to-morrow afternoon." He made a note of the fact. "Can we dine somewhere to-night?" He consulted his notebook again. "But I can't, I'm sorry; Vi's got a dinner on of sorts." He threw a side-glance at my tweed suit.

"I have an appointment to-night," I said, which was not true, though I could easily make it so.

"Right!" said he. "What do you say to lunch?" He was still suspicious of my tweed suit and tweed hat, but he braced himself together for a brotherly heroism. "You've heard of Uncle Jacob?"

"Not a word!"

"Poor old chap, he had a stroke last week. It's his second, and he's very bad. Shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't pull through. Been a very successful man, old uncle, you know. Funny kind of mind, and very close."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he had fifty strokes one on top of another. It's all the pent-up energy he has vampired from others working out in him, and his old tissues can't stand it. That kind of man always works out in strokes in the end. You cast your mind over the men you know and see if it isn't so. It's a kind of readjustment of things, only it's inadequate, and it doesn't reimburse the creatures who have been vampired. Men like that ought to be thrashed once a week to retard their fiendish domination. No, his ailments don't move me to the least spark of sympathy."

It was strange how I looked for company in this great city. Could I have had Guala to turn to, I would have had abundant company. There would have been no corner needing to be filled. But here I was restless. Nothing satisfied. It was like drinking a salt liquor. After leaving Frank, I went to see some of the editors, and others, whom I had known, most of whom had passed on to other things, but some of whom were glad to see me. I could not complain that few wished to see me, for I cannot truly say I wished to see them, but the restlessness had to be satisfied. I also wrote to Ethna—more cheerily than the event justified, for I feared greatly for her. I also sent her some books.

Tim came over again that night, and we three sat and

talked till late. Now that we were away from the actual presence of Earth I found Ramsay eager and avid to hear my speculations upon her real being. Her lively demonstrations of her knowledge and overwhelming colossal sympathy reached him, if only in my conversations. He was a bookman. But with Tim I had an odd sense that he was always before me in the field, though he had never canvassed these conceptions. And then I found myself wondering if he were not really an earth-presence, or, as one may say, an earth-realisation, strangely gone astray.

I was to dine with Frank at his club the following night to hear the result of his interview, and the day drew out heavily enough. It was not till our dinner was well forward that I asked him how he had fared.

"She's a very awkward person to discuss with," he said; and I could see he had begun to sympathise with me in desiring a severance of the bond that held me to her, though for reasons remote enough from mine. "You can't make any headway with her. She keeps on talking about her duty. My dear man, she positively wants you to go back to her. I suppose we never want a thing till we are beginning to lose it."

"She spoke about her duty, with me."

"Of course it's her book she's running her head against. You writers are a curious lot of people. It's her book, you see. She has committed herself, I suppose. Always avoid commitments, I say. Though why, because she has written something in a book, she should want to push herself into your pocket, I can't for the life of me see."

"Perhaps she wants to push me in her pocket," I said bitterly.

"Ha, ha; that's good. Well, I'm glad you can see the humorous side of it. I told her that, mind you; I told her that we had read her book, Vi and myself, and liked it immensely (always stroke people down first: what, eh?), but that she shouldn't let her right and proper pride in a book make her inflict a very grave injustice on—eh—this lady friend of yours."

"Miss Cahill."

"Miss Cahill, is her name? Old Irish name that is; I like it, Jack. But there, with all due respect to Rhoda, women are unreasonable kind of people to talk to. Vi's just

the same in her kind of way. She wouldn't hear, last night, of the idea of you marrying a waitress in a tea-shop—just as if a thing of that kind really matters in the end. But to return to the question : I reminded her that she was originally responsible for the state of affairs, and that it was due to her to do something. And what do you think she said ? ”

“ I haven't the dimmest notion.” Dark, heavy clouds were about me as I heard his speech from afar.

“ She said she would go back to you. You see, that's the difficulty of talking to women ; they always swing back to a thing one has left a long time before.” He looked balefully across the heavy room. “ You may talk as much as you like about women's rights and women's economic freedom, and all that kind of thing—however, that's got nothing to do with it. At any rate, I pointed out to her that—that's to say, I asked her what she would do if you—well, you know, dispensed with a marriage formula. You could do that in the West of Ireland : there'd be no chattering females there, would there ? ” (I heard him in patience. Life was at low ebb in me, and his desire to help me was very genuine.) “ And she spoke of living in sin. Which is carrying a good thing a bit too far, it strikes me. I could scarcely say that to her, but I was careful to show her, you may be sure, that it would be she who would be responsible for such a result—supposing you did such a thing. Of course, I only used it as an argument.”

“ You need not think I pay any exaggerated deference to the legal system of forcibly pairing eternal couples. To me, a life with Ethna is beyond human interference. But she has grown accustomed to looking at things a certain way. It is right in her, and, anyway, it is her. I would as soon think of striking a babe with my blackthorn as injuring her slowly-thriving but quite wonderful mind. Though to me these legal permissions and intermissions are a monstrous impertinence.”

“ Oh, I don't agree with you there. You fly off to the other extreme. In substance there may be something in what you say. I'm not a narrow-minded man, mark you ; and if you sometimes think I am, you make a very great mistake. But there's no sense in going to such lengths.”

“ Is it hopeless then ? ” He, somehow, seemed to make the blackness of the prospect a still more unendurable thing.

"I don't know. I had to use a little craft." And he chuckled softly to himself. "I finished up pleasantly and amicably. And then I told her that Professor Archibald was coming for the week-end—could she come and meet him? He wasn't, but I wired to him. I shall have another go at her then. One can fight better in one's own house."

V

THE RESULT OF MY MISSION

We decided that my presence during the week-end, on its own merits, would be inadvisable, inasmuch as, in the event of failure or partial success, there would still remain the chance of a subsequent interview by myself. Besides which, under the circumstances, it was impossible for my legal wife and myself to be in one house together with strangers there also. And behind all such arguments there was the tacit fact that Viola, in her great and resplendent way, had always been sheathed in an impervious dislike of myself. It had always been so, though no one spoke of it, and everyone would have been horrified at the breath of such a notion—especially Viola. So I had to remain steadfast in such patience as I could muster.

Even in these few days the issue had begun to tear my nerves, and, judging from my own state, I could only imagine what the suspense was meaning to Ethna. Her letters, that came daily, and sometimes twice daily, harried me the more. Not a word did she write in them of any doubt or pain, but the very avoidance spoke its own message. And, coming from her, to whom love could be so self-complete a thing, her declarations of her utter willingness to be sacrificed to it told

me of the dear strong soul in Dublin that was slowly bleeding. I knew her; I marvelled sometimes to think how well I knew her; therefore her letters were to me the barings of her soul, and I shrank in pain at those revelations. Sometimes I felt as though I could have risen to any crime if it was truly to aid her—I thought wildly of certain things; but the thought of Guala, and the great baring of God I had known in that presence, came to me, and slowly calmed me as with a strong rhythm.

It was a sultry calm. It soothed the spirit, but the result of its solace became such on the striving and thwarted desire that it deadened me, it sank me in a complete, seemingly irretrievable, dejection, even as a glorious summer's noon may strip the intellect of all activity—with this difference, that there were tragic tears in my gloom. Complete night seemed to have enveloped me, and out of the darkness there came the voice of one wailing.

Ramsay noticed it, and he rallied me sharply on the fact. It was, I remember, on the Sunday night. Tim had been with us all the day. One or two had come in during the evening whom I had not seen for the whole time of my life in Ireland: such men as Parkins (more cynical than ever), Jenson (blander and stouter) and one or two others. But my thoughts had been with Frank's interview with Rhoda, and the conversation had flowed on past me. It was now near midnight, and everybody had gone. We had been sitting alone, quietly smoking, for some time when he spoke.

"I can't understand you," he said, and his quiet words left his lips almost as inauspiciously as his tobacco smoke, and as gently; "here you have been living for five years in the centre of power, and your state now is as nerve-strung as any boy's. As I don't know Miss Cahill I can't say anything about her, though your faith in her is abundantly sufficient for any who know you. But you now raise that question by your present mood."

"I don't understand myself, Ramsay; but I should have thought that the emotional situation might have suggested itself to you. And to find that is as far as intelligence can go. Intelligence doesn't often get so far."

"I'm trying to find the relation between the past five years and what you call the emotional situation."

"Your wit might have saved you the search. You are looking for plums in April. Don't think I have lost faith because my soul is torn and rent: I have not lost faith, but my soul is torn none the less. You are knocking at doors that cannot be opened. These things, like all great things, are paradoxes, and escape the brain. I believe with all my heart that in five years I shall see the appropriateness of this moment, but with all my heart if I could forego it I would. You don't understand it? Nor do I; but I know it is so."

"That's not my point. I can't see how the life of power impinges, if I may use the word, on this moment."

"Because you are annoyed that life refuses to be put into an intellectual term; and you start by being impatient with things that mar your preconceived synthesis. Your mind goes in the vicious circle of books—and that is one of the literary circles, if I may put it that way."

Ramsay smiled in his chair like one who would say, "Come, that is distinctly healthier," and I was glad he should be pleased at the little sally, for I did not wish to struggle against unfaith in the inner places as well as in the outer. Tim himself, I had felt, had been puzzled with me all day.

"Look, Ramsay," I went on, "there have always been the links between the periods of my life; but who saw them at the time? Who saw the connection between 'Sartor Resartus' and the pimply idiot in a tall white collar and careful gloves, or between that odd enough conjunction and a realisation of myself and a literary career? Least of all you, who came as the angel of light, with a divine and blessed sense of things that has made you the biggest single moulding influence in my life. Who saw the connection between my meeting a typist in Giorgio's restaurant, and all the unrest and longing for certitude in a terrestrial career that brought to me, with the laboured reading before it and the striving expression after it? No one, no one to this moment save myself alone, and least of all Rhoda. Who saw the connection between a certain development in all my writing and my subsequent life in Ireland that appeared when Rhoda left me, and I was left numbed with pain? No one, yet so it was. Or to revert: who saw the connection between my ordinary boyhood and all that has happened since? (For all boyhoods are ordinary, as we know, Ramsay, despite the fanciful foolery of biographers.

Or better still, all boyhoods are extraordinary, only the better part of men lose the wonder of its possibility, falling away from, as it were, instead of developing, its startling spontaneity.) The only thing my boyhood left with me was a colossal ignorance, and therefore a cleanness to new receptions ; and an extraordinary sense of homelessness that has haunted me all my days. Saving that, I see no connection, but no doubt it exists. And you ask now, what is the connection between my five years of power, of joy, of peace, of self-realisation, and this Darkness of Night, this utter bewilderment in utter love, that has caught me ? Frank to-day has spoken to Rhoda ; and though I hope and hope against all hope, I have no expectation of success. The future is terrible to see, in that case, for, Ethna being who and where she is, I cannot ask her to outrage herself—as she would deem what she would call an unsanctified union, unsanctified, that is to say, by interfering clerics. For myself, I might withdraw to Gleann-na-Siothchana, and embrace the necessary discipline. But what of her ? You don't know her, Ramsay. She strives, she reaches forward, she wishes to embrace more than is possible for her. Therefore she is continually thwarted and spiritually exasperated. For one week she had the rest, the fulness, of realisation, of possession. Broken away from it now, her striving to possess again what she once possessed (and what will be for ever impossible to possess) will kill her, as I truly believe, she is so exquisitely constructed. This is my Darkness of Night ; and the connection between what may happen in it (what is happening, if you will) and the five years under Guala, it is impossible to know. It looks like a cynical smashing of it all, like a brutal burst of laughter in the face of it, cancelling everything like an inverted comedy. And yet I believe, were you to bring me a simple solution to it all, a kind of a god-in-the-machine solution, I would refuse it, and abide what may be. I mean I have faith in some kind of connection to be achieved : but oh, the pain of it, Ramsay, the inconceivable pain of sitting here like this, and that girl in Dublin bleeding, slowly bleeding. It drains the strength out of me and makes me like a helpless child. It isn't life any more than the other (I hope it won't prove to be life any less than the other) ; but it's less endurable. However, no doubt we shall pull through : smiling perhaps."

The following morning I received a letter from Frank bursting with radiancy. "She returns to-morrow after lunch," he wrote, "go up and see her, and I think you'll find things all right. I brought her round to a reasonable state of mind. If you strike the iron when I left it hot, I think you'll find things will come round quite to your liking. Good luck to you."

I found it difficult to adjust myself to this. It puzzled me rather than relieved. I tried to imagine Frank and Rhoda discussing the matter, and Rhoda foregoing her inaccessible stubbornness at his desire; but my mind refused it. Yet here it was clearly enough as I read it again. Frank was a man of business, and therefore presumably no fool (though that did not necessarily follow); and his words were explicit enough. It only remained to me to do as he suggested. I resolved to see her when there was least chance of anyone being with her.

She received me apologetically, a little diffidently. "I don't want even to seem discourteous," she said, "to you of all people, Jack. But you have come a bit late, haven't you? I have some people coming to dinner, and I was just going to dress."

"I won't keep you a few minutes," I said. "Frank told me you were going to stay with Viola for the week-end, and I suggested he should speak to you——" It was not easy to come to the point.

"Yes?" she said interrogatively, and a little watchfully.

"I have a note from him saying that you have agreed—in short, that you have agreed to institute proceedings against me."

"Frank said that?"

"I have his letter."

"Frank's a fool."

"You'll pardon me, but don't you rather speed ahead of my intelligence?"

"My dear Jack, you know Frank. He talks and talks, and continues talking, until you say 'Yes' to him out of very boredom. He hypnotises you, until you do anything to escape him. He assumes that he has a fatherly right to dictate your course of action to you—it's perfectly impossible to deny him, and the only thing to do is to agree to everything,

and to fail to put anything into effect. He'll put it down to the vagaries of your sex, of course, and talk loudly about its unfitness for affairs. But what does it matter what a man like that says? He doesn't think. He's just a bundle of prejudices, and it's a foregone conclusion what he'll say in any event. I was a fool to go down there. Vi's just a feminine—and, I may say, a stupider—edition of Frank with the large airs she gives herself. They both bore me, but I suppose my will was enfeebled by him. And I'm sorry if my dejected air of compliance with his torrent of words made you think——”

“It didn't really,” I said coldly, for life was dulled within me. “I found it difficult to conceive of one so coolly brilliant as yourself stooping to the humanity of a kind action.”

That stayed her. It discomposed her too, and a faint flush came creeping into her cheek.

“That's unlike you, Jack,” she said. “You used not to be unkind.” She quivered a little, to my surprise.

“Unkindness is an opportune subject between us two, I suggest,” I said.

“Is it?”

“Do I really understand that you will not help me to make the divorce that exists between us a legal affair?” I pleaded with her.

“I have said so, Jack. But I deny——”

“You have written a book on the subject,” I suggested, breaking in on her.

That revived her again. “Oh, Frank discoursed on that theme in his blind, unintelligent way. I think you have the wit to see that my book sprang from the same sincere conviction as my present attitude that so offends you.”

“Oh, all of us are sincere in our convictions. It only depends how we came to acquire those sincere convictions.”

“I'm sorry, but I don't quite follow you.”

“In a word, that your sincere convictions are a matter of sales,”—she flushed suddenly—“just as Parkins, who I learn attacked my book anonymously in three different papers, sincerely thought it bad because he sincerely did not wish it to prosper. We are all sincere enough, but we may not all be admirable.”

“You are a very arrogant man, Jack.”

“And you,” I said, “are a vindictively-willed woman.”

Excuse my bluntness, but these may happen to be the last words we will exchange together, and I wish to make one thing clear. I came to you apologetically, with a very great tenderness in my thought for you. I wished to spare you pain, but I wished also to do what seemed my immediately right thing to do. In my mind the memory of our life together, and especially of the way you stood bravely and unflinchingly by me in our poverty and need, was very warm, even to throwing the shadow of a doubt over this new relation that has come into my life. That tenderness of thought you have turned to something very like bitterness and hatred. All those warm memories you have cancelled, and made them to be objects of physical and spiritual revulsion—I cannot consider the thought of them. You have made me look back over the whole of our relations together through the gateway of this moment—and the sight is not pleasant. You may have ruined my life; I don't know, I scarcely care. You may have ruined a life a great deal more to me than mine is. These things will probably concern you little, they may only give you a text for more sentimental rubbish about the holiness of forms where no mind is. But it may or may not affect you closer to know that you have ruined your life in my memory. You have stripped that house bare anyway."

The chill night air struck about me as I walked quickly out. I walked fiercely till midnight, in a confusion of tears and helpless distress. A fever was in my brain, and nothing I could do seemed to give it ease. It was like a torment boiling within, demanding the quick motion of my limbs, and being the more agitated by that. It worked on, till it worked itself numb. That was not till after midnight. I was then, I remembered later, out near Acton, and I crept into some hotel for the night, for I was unutterably weary.

It was not till long after that a vague memory came to me of seeing Rhoda sink with white face and short, gasping breath among the cushions on her sofa. Her gaze seemed then to be fixed at a very great distance. I do not know if the memory were accurate, or a heavier relation of what occurred.

VI

IN ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN

Apprehensively I sat in the train that plunged through darkness, bearing me back towards Ethna. Frank, his hearty energy expended, had relapsed into the automatic round of his money-making ; and I had only seen him on the morning after my interview for a short time, while he descanted on the extraordinary nature of women (he regarded women objectively, as belonging to as different a world as the beasts). But Ramsay and Tim had come to see me at Euston station, and it had been touchingly plain to me that they had been concerned for me, that they were half-afraid to let me away from their sight. There had not been much said, but the atmosphere was there. In fact, I had not been disposed to exchange many words with anyone, and I was glad beyond measure, as I looked out on the darkness that flew past the window, that the train was an empty one and that I had the carriage to myself. It seemed to give me the space I needed, and I was even glad at leaving my two friends, for the same reason. It was this, in fact, I think they most feared, and the mood that wrought it in me.

To say that I was dulled would be to say truly, and yet it would not be all of truth. In a sense I was also very sharply alert and alive. It would have taken very little to have made me flame up in a torment of joy or of grief. It was as though I sat in the midst of a terrible and unrelievable darkness while the outer edges of my being, the limits of my ultra-physical self, were being played upon by an eternity of intense and beautiful light, and that either realm might suddenly encroach on the other. I could see none other than the darkness, but I was aware of the light ; and it was as though I trembled, in my numbed state, in those strange thrills that came from afar. Similarly a man might obtrude an arm into dazzling sunlight from a cold and clammy cell, and tremble in a joy that accentuated his despair.

I was strangely aware also of Ethna. I had written to her asking her to meet me on the morrow, but as I sat in that train I seemed to reach out and come into touch with her. Somewhere she and I had merged. Her rich and completing

sex seemed to flow about me with an appeal that intoxicated me while it remained a purging influence. I ached, sometimes with a pang scarcely to be borne, to press my lips upon hers and to have in my nostrils the scent of her hair. It was the first time her sex had appealed to me in that alive way, and it aroused me to a piercing tenderness over her image as I conjured it before me. It made my despair seem the more hopeless; and as I sat thus, beneath my seeming deadness, in some secret quarter of my being, there was a strange riot of emotions, of black despair, of bitter cynicism against the artificial ordering of things that both Ethna and Rhoda, in their differing ways, obeyed, of thwarted and imperative hunger, of dizzy desires, of strange thrills of unutterable joy that timidly pulsed across the tormented field.

The following morning, as I sat in a restaurant opposite St. Stephen's Green over a completed breakfast, I saw Ethna push through the door and come eagerly stepping towards me; and the desire in each of us made the joy of that sight beautiful for that moment.

"Come," I said softly to her, "let us go into St. Stephen's Green. The fresh air better suits than this."

And indeed the air that early October morning was like wine. The inexpressible scent of it was like a wonderful aroma, and stirred a great longing in me for my glen. There was no one in the Green, where the air hung poised delicately like a balloon. The ducks, adorned with the memory of many distant lakes, were the only life visible, as they busied themselves breaking their fast. Very soon, I thought, the plover would be on Guala, and the wail of curlew and the calling of the wild geese would come down on the wind and float round about the village.

"On such a morning as this," I said to her, scarcely thinking what it was I said, "what a happiness it would be for the two of us to come out of my cabin and make over the wonderful hills!"

For answer she drew my arm fiercely closer to her, and I felt her tremble through her whole body. I bent and drew her to me in a kiss. Her manner was the fearful expression of her question, and I feared to give her its reply.

"She won't release me, my dear, she won't release me," I said at length.

Her sudden limpness beside me let me know how much she had feared this blow.

"Why?" she asked feebly, when the shock had passed away; and again I perceived in her flaccid manner how much the fires had burned in her, wasting her.

I had to tread the centre of the furnace, and it was of no avail to try and avoid that midmost heat. If I took it now I obviated it for a later time, and possibly wrought a better conclusion. So I set myself to saying the one true thing that would most make her to realise precisely what our love meant.

"She says our marriage bond is a duty she intends to maintain." It had not been easy to say, and the way Ethna looked suddenly up at me with wide, fearful eyes when she realised the full import of the words, made me curse myself for having said them. Her arm fell out of mine as though it no longer had a right to be there, and she shrank almost as though she feared me. Yet, having started in that way, I had to continue it. "I saw her twice, and it was clear to me that she means to keep up that attitude. My brother saw her twice: first she told him what she told me, and the second time she just got rid of him. Yesterday morning my friend Ramsay saw her, and she refused absolutely to discuss the question with anyone but myself. Then when he asked her if it would be any good if I saw her again, she said she had been foolish in leaving me, and that if he would use his influence towards a reconciliation she would be glad. That showed very clearly how stupid it would be for me to go again. I thought once—but never mind about that! It would be almost sacrilegious to us here, dear, if I put exactions upon her that I knew she could not observe and that would be of no avail to me if she did observe. It would be merely insulting to everybody, and I doubt if it would make her realise the futility of things." I had gone on talking partly to stupefy myself, but I could not bear her continued and numb silence. "Oh, Ethna, Ethna, say something for the dear God's sake," I cried out. "You have suffered: how you have suffered! I can see it written all over you."

"And you have suffered too," she said quickly, looking round on me with wide, reproachful eyes and taking my hand in hers. "We have both suffered." She seemed already years older. A new and wonderful gravity was shining in her. "And I

have been thinking too much of myself," she added. But the pain that stirred in her was no longer to be resisted. "Oh, Jack!" she wailed, holding my coat and burying her head on her hands.

I was too near her own mood to be of any assistance to her. But then she sprang up again in a rebellion that flushed through her.

"But what right has she got to talk like that?" she cried. Her lips were pressed angrily together, and her eyes flashed indignation at me as though it were me she attacked. "She didn't want to keep you, and she lost you, and what right has she got to talk like that? It's just because she knows there is somebody else, that's all it is. She doesn't really want you now, she knows very well she doesn't, or she wouldn't talk of duty; and I need you. I—oh, you show me things; it's black without you, it has been black all these days."

"Come and sit down, dear," I said, "you're shaking." I thought indeed she would fall, and I drew her to a seat.

"Don't you think she might in the end?" she asked.

"I wish I could think so. But no one can be more stubborn than she. That has been her chief characteristic."

She turned to me with a question on her lips. I guessed it though she did not speak it. Her attitude of utter misery made me sure that I had guessed aright, and I led towards its subject along a different way.

"Ethna, dear girl, I have brought much unhappiness to you, I fear. I am so sorry. Had I only thought of this in the beginning——"

But she checked me quickly, wildly. "Don't, don't, don't! If you only knew, you would never say that. Don't say it! Think of me now and before I met you! Isn't there a difference in it? Ah, but I know where I am now, though I cry about the other things; and I just got up and went to bed and quarrelled with people in between, then." She smiled through tears at me. "Oh, Jack, don't say that! I really don't mean to be like this, oh, I don't, for I do love you, I do absolutely; and I wouldn't go outside that for anything now, not for anything. I oughtn't to be distressed like this, surely, but if you only knew how much I wanted you!"

"Dear little woman, and there is no thought in my mind but to bring you blessing—indeed, that's my chief concern just

now, and brings me the most pain. In my cabin you would fill the glen with a music it never knew before. But you do see, dear, don't you, that in the very sacreddest of possible plights we are pledged together? that her helping to cancel the other bond is only a matter of a convenience or inconvenience?"

"Why, yes, it must be so," said she, as though any other thought were inconceivable.

Then I put the question to her she had wished to put to me: "What are we to do now, then?" I asked.

She stared ahead of her, rapt in thought; and as I looked on the clear colour of her cheek so close to me it paled slowly, and her face became set and drawn. A matter that to me was simple enough was a tragic problem to her, and I wished, as far as in me lay, not to coerce her to a decision by any claim of mine, believing it would come of itself, and more happily, in her own free choice. Her hand sought for mine and gripped it fiercely.

"What do you think?" she asked. She did not turn my way, and her voice was low, almost, indeed, a whisper.

"To me," I said, "there is no question. Nothing can make our union holier than it is. The fact that someone will or will not take steps to have a bond set aside that has already lost all its meaning, and the fact that someone else can or cannot therefore be persuaded to grant a dispensation to concede a thing that already exists, and is so blessed in its existence, seems to me to be all a bundle of impertinences. Do all those things make our love lose its beauty to you? Tell me that, Ethna!"

"No!" She straightened up, and the word exploded from her lips with a defined challenge to the world.

"And that is the answer to everything, dear. Never let anyone persuade you that a thing that is pure and beautiful is a thing that can possibly be otherwise than absolutely the very thing to be done. Nothing that's ugly is right, and nothing that's truly beautiful is wrong. Those are the only rights and wrongs in the world, and whoever says otherwise has some self-interest to serve." She was already happier in the streaming autumn sunshine that gave depth and added warmth to her heavy hair, and a simpler translucency to her cheek where it fell upon it. The light was warmer

too as slowly she stripped away piece after piece of the outworn raiment others had put upon her. "It is you who must decide, dear," I went on, "for it is with you there is any question. But if you say to me that you wish to come to Gleann-na-Siothchana with me, you will be my wife in the richest meaning of that word that so many have abused and made rather stuffy and common. We will each help the other, we will each stand opposite the other, free of the other and yet pledged to the other, dependent and yet independent, two and yet one, free and yet servants. If we spoil the thing the fault will be at no other doors than our own; but I don't think we will; and in my case that is part of the splendid adventure of it. My decision needed no taking, and I am ready and waiting. It is you who must decide now, my Ethna."

In the exceeding simplicity of the thing to me I lost sight of what it meant to her. It meant, for her, exchanging firm ground, or what at any rate seemed firm ground, for the air. Her conviction in the general rightness of her matured principles was not shaken. She was, in truth, seeking to make out a particular case where those principles did not apply. She had to tread those principles under foot to come to me, while yet believing in them: with the continual thought that she trampled them under foot in mere selfish, inordinate pleasure—a thing against the grain of her nature. Her distress was apparent, and I yearned infinitely over her as she raised possible difficulties.

"But Father Magennis would let the priest down there know, and we would find it impossible."

I had not thought of that. This close network of a system baffled the whole issue. "But does Father Magennis know where I live?" I asked in alarm.

"He would find out from Auntie Walpole."

"But does she know? Did you tell her?"

"I don't think so, but she may have seen my letters."

She had, with bent brows, been throwing up questions perplexedly as she sought her way through her difficulty, but a whole new difficulty arose before me as I heard her. I saw the whole of this social, or religio-social, system I wished to neglect, standing up to defy us. It suddenly became like a network that had us in its meshes. For the people in the village, good simple friends of mine though they were, would

ostracise us, were they informed by Father Hefferan that we were, in the cant phrase, "living in sin." Father Hefferan himself would be changed—good soul though he were, and as removed from the mere clerical system as any man could be; and Michael O'Hara, who gave his lip-service to the system though his heart were elsewhere, would find himself slowly alienated, even against his best will. The very nobility of the people would take strength against us, for they were pure, and they would be informed that the thing we were going to do was impure. It was monstrous enough, yet so it was, and attested the atrophy of healthful judgment mere codes and precepts of conduct always work in the end, however healthful the people in whom they work.

As Ethna was working her way to clearness she had unknowingly transplanted the alarm to my own mind. I scarcely knew how to deal with it, but the music of a slow chime coming through the sunlit air cut across our speech with its silver note.

"Oh," she cried, starting up, "there's twelve o'clock, and I ought to be beginning my first piece now."

"Once late won't make so great a difference, you silly little woman."

"But I'm never late," she declared, and I well believed her.

Her only thought now was to speed back to her task, but my thought was busy on the difficulty she had raised in me.

"Do you think if I saw Father Magennis it would help matters?" I asked as we hurried along crowded Grafton Street.

"It might," she said, taking hold of my hand, though I doubt if her thoughts were with my question.

"I'll go and see him straightway," I said. "What is his address?"

She told me; and when I left her I went forthwith to seek him out, thinking to untie this immediate knot in the system.

VII

FATHER MAGENNIS

I admit, frankly, I did not know what I did. I had never yet come into contact with the whole wide, complicated system into which I now so blunderingly put my foot. That must be my excuse. It is ever the wise way, in opposing a system, to stand outside it, fare well fare ill. I was troubled and anxious lest Ethna, in taking the step I felt she would, would find a ring of steel about her ; I was also, I suppose, quickly prone to such anxiety, being nerve-racked after these days of strife and pain and despair ; and it seemed to me that I would be able to enlist Father Magennis, if not fully in our cause, at least to a desire not to create misery by meddling in our deep concerns. I, knowing our cause so pure, thought to appeal to the man in him, and silence him by a frank confidence. I was judging by what I had found of Father Hefferan, whose kindly disposition and shrewd charity had the same effect in him as breadth of mind might have in another.

His appearance certainly encouraged that thought. He was an elderly man with grey hair that nearly faded into snow, and his face, with long upper lip and upturned nose, had a grave humour attached to it, while his high, trim forehead and high cheekbones made it instinct with quiet dignity and intense spiritual rigidity. One side of his room was filled with books, which, before he had entered, I had naturally scrutinised. They were all Catholic devotional books. In my judgment devotional books of every kind should be expressly forbidden, inasmuch as they always beget a false fervour, a fervour not born of spiritual experience, but burned up in an intellectual outhouse of the being, and transported thence into the soul by a kind of sleight, giving the sum total of things an erroneous quality. They nearly always damage the health of the spiritual estate. They engender a detachment from real experience that cannot but work a kind of spiritual viciousness, and may even, in the end, corrupt the moral fibres while begetting a high moral pride, I feared those books, but when the man entered, and spoke to me in his quiet caressing voice and assured manner, he invited confidence.

"I don't know if I caught your name rightly," he said in a broad Dublin accent. "My good housekeeper is a bit deaf."

"Jacob Elthorne," I informed him, wondering whether to land bravely into the subject of my visit, or lead gently to it.

"Ah yes! And you wished to see me?"

"I certainly came with that end in view."

He looked up at me, and smiled in a gentle, caressing way. "That was a stupid question," he said. His manner was one of professional attention.

I began to feel that I had better invent some chance subject, and leave him, for I was vaguely uncomfortable. But that seemed a foolish thing to do. I had come with an intention, and I was not going to let an undefined fearfulness throw me away from it. So I proceeded, and proceeded directly.

"You know Miss Ethna Cahill?"

"Perfectly," he said, "the niece of my very dear parishioner Mrs. Walpole."

"We had wished to marry," I began, when he interposed quickly and quietly:

"You are a Catholic then?"

"I am not," I said, "though, equally well, I would scarcely call myself a Protestant."

"I see, an Agnostic?"

"Nor that. I like to think myself a Christian in an unobtrusive way, and I hold myself detached from each of the exclusively organised systems of Christianity."

"But you must be one or the other," he insisted firmly. The world to him was a place of organised combative communities, as it is to most; but he was not puzzled by a denial of them, he quietly ruled it out.

"Excuse me, but I don't protest against you, any more than I protest against them, or than I protest against anyone who seeks to make what is firstly and lastly an enriching and completing experience into a system. However, that is not what I came to speak to you about. I have been married——"

"That," said he with finality, and as though relieved to get such assistance from me, "makes it altogether impossible."

"But my dear sir——" I began again.

"You came to me for my advice, and I can't tell you more than is surely so."

"I suppose," I said, "that if I were not divorced—in such a possible and extreme case, put it for the sake of argument—well, what would you consider of a union hypothetically under those conditions? I am interested in your views, I may say."

"It would not be a union. It would be carnal sin."

"Could you pray for such a union?"

"I should seek to reclaim my child. I should do all things to save her soul, and protect her. Nothing could be too much." He still spoke quietly, but with a flush in his pale cheek.

"And render her more miserable thereby?"

"To create that misery in her life would be the first step in reclamation. To be happy in evil-doing is to be beyond assistance."

There was a mastery in his way of speaking, born of relegated authority, and betraying an inaccessibility of mind. There was also an invincible energy in his quiet manner. It was clearly useless to continue, and I determined to say no more. But as I went my ways I was dogged by the sense that I had made a great mistake in coming to see him.

VIII

THE STORM BREAKS ABOUT ETHNA

I had once known Rhoda in a way that dispensed with speech. Her spirit seemed to set up rhythms that my spirit caught and interpreted into meanings. Or rather, it would possibly be truer to say that our spirits interpenetrated beyond the limitations of our bodies, and communed with each other. That, in fact, had been our marriage. When that ceased we passed out of a state of marriage. And now the same thing began to reproduce itself, in a far more marvellous way, between Ethna and myself. As I sat in a corner of that restaurant that evening, unobserved by her, in every phrase of every piece she played, however jaunty and slight it may have been, a note sang out that told me her deepest being was in a state of upheaval. The morning's news, apparently, had begun to work in her—probably as she had, consciously or subconsciously, brooded upon it—and there seemed faintly to be a wail of terrible agony as she surveyed a world where the brightest dawn came shining perplexedly over a scene of the most hopeless disrepair and tumult. It sent an agony into me as I heard it: if it was I who brought the dawn, it was I who caused the disrepair, and, in that secret world, I cried aloud blindly in the wish that I had not come into her life to cause her such pain.

Therefore I said nothing to her that evening on the matter. I even made no reference to my visit to Father Magennis. It was as if she secretly put a hand out to me, pleading with me to permit things to resolve a little before we spoke again on the immediate matter before us both. I had intended to go with her to her aunt's, so as to adjust the civilities there. But she wished quiet and ease, she wished to look upon the dawn uninterrupted by a sight of the tumult of earth on which it shone; and so we took the tram out to Clontarf and walked back, saying little, but richly enjoying each other. It was quiet and inauspicious enough, but it made her tremble as a battery, so charged was she with the fulfilment of herself. For myself, the quiet passion of that evening, half-sad, half a riot of satisfaction, remains one of the most treasured memories of my days. It is not one of the occasions of which

one can say much. There is too much to say. The misty night, with an early touch of frost in the air, folded us about with its silent and, as it were, intelligent caress, while a faint golden halo shone above Dublin in the near distance. And we went forward silently, feeling an impending tragedy, but drawn the nearer because of that. It was a sacramental night. When I left her at the gate of the boarding-house, she clung to me in a helplessness that, in one so fiercely proud, so imperious and independent, was very pitiful. The memory of that wild embrace tore my mind as I went my way alone. All that night I dreamed restlessly of calamities.

Yet when early the next morning I received a telegram from Ethna asking me to meet her, my uneasiness flamed up in wild alarm like dry tinder touched by a spark. Without waiting for a meal I fled down to St. Stephen's Green, where she had given her appointment, and although it was nearly three-quarters of an hour earlier than the time she had appointed she was there waiting for me. Whatever my alarm before, it was nothing to that which shook me when I saw her tear-stained face, lifeless hair, and eyes that told their tale of a brain hardly held in leash behind them.

"Ethna, Ethna, whatever can be the matter?" I cried.

"Oh, Jack," she said, clinging to my arm, "I haven't slept all this weary night, they have been at me so."

"But you surely haven't told them yet!"

"Father Magennis and all."

Like a blow in the midst of my brain the sense of my error struck me. I had not conceived that a confidence given from a man to a man could be used so foully.

"But——" I began to protest. I was dazed, however, and could but grapple hopelessly with this new situation.

"They were all waiting for me last night, and I didn't know what it was they were saying at all, when they were all talking at me, and calling the curse of God on me. Jack, it isn't a wicked thing I've done, is it? How can it be a wicked thing, and I in the joy of my life, and everything becoming so plain to me that was dark at one time? How can I be wicked? I amn't wicked. I can't be wicked when I'm wanting to be better, when I'm wanting to see better and do so much better, than ever I've wanted before. That isn't to be wicked, is it, Jack? And Father Magennis called the curse

of God on me if ever I might see you again. And they were talking at me all the night till the dawn of this day, both of them, and Father Magennis too. The curse of God it was he called on me, the curse of God it was—if I should go to you. Oh, Jack ! ” She shuddered at that very thought.

“ Look, Ethna, ”—I spoke even roughly to her—“ there’s no man can call the curse of God on you, whatever the kind of dress he wear, or the kind of name he likes to call himself ; and he’s a blasphemer who should be whipped who says that thing. Father Magennis is no more than a liar and a bully, and he’s a damnable usurper too. I’ll whip the skin off him, bullying you ! ”

She heard me vaguely, as from a distance. Her distressed eyes seemed to be gazing on some horror.

“ And Father attached such terrible names to me—I’m surely not deserving them, do you know ! ”

Her voice wailed low, as in a moan of distress. It was terrible to me to see her beaten so low, to see her whipped so thoroughly who was so fiercely pugnacious and proud. I wondered how I might arouse her numbed spirit.

“ I suppose that the cur had hard names for me too, ” I said with bitterness.

She sprang to that as at a spur.

“ Didn’t he ! But not twice, oh, not twice, my dear one. The like of that man, who can’t help me better at all, putting hard names on you ! I told him I looked up to him because he was a priest, but I looked up to you because you helped me, because you were yourself, that all the frocks on him wouldn’t cover over that difference. I was just mad to hear him, and told him things made him wonder at me. I think he was afraid—oh, but he put the curse of God on me, dear, he did that ! ”

“ Ethna, you must hear me ! He can’t do it. There’s no man can do it. It’s a good thing, my dear, that God doesn’t bind himself by every system-monger, drunk with his catchwords, that rises up to curse and to bless. ”

“ Oh, but I told him he had no right to be saying that, no right at all. But he said whosoever he bound on earth should be bound in hell. ”

“ Where did he get hold of that yarn ? ”

"Jesus Christ said it." She seemed surprised at my contempt.

"The Christ never said anything of the sort, and it's positively indecent for anyone to try and bluff you so wickedly. Christ never spoke of hell, He spoke of 'the heavens'; and what the loosing and binding there is we scarcely know, and surely never will know in that way of talk, or by that kind of man, for all his bluff and question-begging. Ethna, let me beg of you, in the name of the dignity and divinity of manhood and womanhood, don't commit your free judgment, your upright, healthful choice, into the keeping of anyone, whatever kind of clothes they wear. You know what we are going to do is free and worthy. You know that, so do I: I think, dear, I may say we wouldn't do it if it weren't so. We, in our free and pure judgment, elect to do this: Ethna, Ethna, my dear, what can the word of a mere outsider do to make it otherwise? It's so preposterous. Think, dear, can a clean thing be made unclean at the dictate of a man who smothers his mind with unhealthy foetid books?"

"Oh, I do think. I keep saying that to myself—just as you have put it—but then the thought comes to me that he is a priest after all."

"Oh, we are all priests if we aim highly and keep clean."

"Jack, you're so splendid saying things like that. And I do believe it—oh, I do, I do. But there's a difference too."

"Dear girl, what difference?"

"I don't know. It comes out in my mind."

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, she broke down in tears, in a torrent of nerve-strung sobs that shattered her frame. I drew her to a shrub-enclosed seat away from the eye of curious passers-by, and sought to comfort her. But there was no comfort. The strain of suspense upon her striving spirit—to which Life had been brought with promise of fulfilment, and cruelly snatched away—her harassed mind with a problem before it beyond its growth to unriddle, and this last devastating storm that had ruthlessly swept upon a place the least of all prepared to receive it—all joined in rocking her being to its very foundations. The extremity to which her sobs reduced her seemed at times almost to prevent her recovery. She even terrified me. I held on to my mind with all my strength lest I should become as wild and

unrestrainable as she, for that would have been beyond the limits of her endurance.

"If I went away for a time, would that help matters?" I said to her, scarce knowing what it was I said.

It made her worse, for it gave poignancy to the breakdown of her endurance.

"You mustn't, you mustn't," she said, gripping hold of my arm in wild terror. "What should I do without you? Promise me you won't. But you can't, you couldn't do it. If I ruin myself, I must have you, for I'm needing you; my darling, I'm crying for you; with all my body and all my soul and all my spirit I'm crying for you; it would be all dark without you; I should go mad without you; I couldn't bear it. Jack, you won't go away?"

"No, dear, I won't, I promise you. I'll do whatever you wish of me, for I'm yours to serve in the highest and best way."

I folded her about and calmed her, while she clung nervously and fearfully to me. It was a delicate structure, this, that had been caught at the meeting-place of strong contentions, a delicate spirit most delicately houselled. She was not yet in possession of her various self; she had not yet brought herself to a well-knit unity, acting under the response of strong centres; and her mind fled through the differing regions of her soul not knowing where it should rest, racking and destroying the brain and the body it used. They were not competent to bear the powers that came into them, and had I not folded her with my arms and spoken gently and caressingly to her I hardly know what she would have done.

Presently she became calmer, growing almost heavy and inert as she did so. The strife in her had left her weakened and flaccid. Then she gathered herself together to leave.

"Where are you going, dear? You can't go to work to-day." I asked of her.

"I must go home and sleep." She took my hand in hers and kissed it.

Then a tremor leapt in her eyes. I leant forward and put an unspoken question to her.

"They are all at home, I suppose," she answered. "I left them there. I ran away from them."

"I shall come with you," I resolved.

"Oh no," she cried.

"Yes, I will, and speak to them myself. I'll not have them bullying you like this."

IX

I STEP INTO THE STORM MYSELF

For the only time I lamented Dublin's noble fidelity to her jaunting car. Ethna's mind and body had been beaten into a state of utter fatigue, and she sighed every now and again, a long, quivering sigh, as a child might in memory of a past sorrow, but with a note that seemed to hint depths latent in it that were ready to break forth again and work renewed havoc in her. She rested against me almost as if the touch of my person were a surrounding comfort. It made me loom up as her protector. And that was the touching part of it, for she had always resented me in that capacity, seeming to regard angrily anyone who stood between her and her proper battles.

Mrs. Walpole's reception of Ethna was as of one greatly aggrieved, but with me that woman with such possibilities of kindness was like a bitter frost. She drew Ethna in, and then stood out in a way that plainly defied me to enter. The situation was a difficult one. Not to have entered, with Ethna inside expecting me to follow, was impossible; and yet to raise a protest, with the prospect of a clamour to follow, was equally impossible, since it would have raised further distress in Ethna's mind. I made as though to enter, but her position defied me, while her manner made it clear that her position was no accidental one.

I spoke to her quietly and gently: "Please don't let us have any scene here, Mrs. Walpole. Ethna's in a very distressed state, and it would only make her bad again. She is expecting me to follow her."

Mrs. Walpole said nothing, but stood there mutely challenging me. One could not but respect her, she was so very intense and dignified.

Happily the situation was not pushed to unpleasantness. I saw a hand appear on her arm from the darkness of the hall beyond, and draw her aside. It was Father Magennis. He whispered some words to her, and gravely invited me to enter. It was as though he summoned some naughty child to his presence, but it would have been idle to have taken offence at a question of manner.

Walpole himself was there. That seemed to argue the extreme seriousness of the question, except that I do not suppose he very much resented an excuse not to go to work. He sat easily in a corner of the dim and dowdy room, with a pretence of considerable injury on his pasty face.

"Ethna," I said to her, "you go upstairs to your room and lie down and rest. It would perhaps be just as well if you weren't here, and you ought to rest a bit."

A moment's flash of her pugnacious self swept over her, but I caught her glance with my own and held it firmly.

"Little woman, to please me," I added softly to her.

"It would be just as well, Ethna," said Father Magennis with a touch of authority. "I want to speak with Mr. Elthorne."

Quickly she turned about on him, and her manner spoke clear hostility. But she turned to me again, and I took her arm and led her gently out.

The incident made the opposing camps clearly defined, and fully charged, when I re-entered the room. Mrs. Walpole stood by Father Magennis white and angry, Father Magennis sat at the table obviously piqued at finding a higher authority than his with one of his parishioners, and Walpole leaned forward in his chair like one who would have blustered but for the fear of his being put in his place by Father Magennis.

All their eyes were on me as I came forward and stood at the table opposite them.

For a moment or so the silence was tense. But I came with a kiss freshly put upon my lips by Ethna, and that made me keen for the issue.

"Excuse me, Father Magennis," I said, "may I ask you what you would call marriage?"

"That alone which is solemnised by the Church," he said promptly, and as though glad that I so introduced the subject.

It was the reply I had led for, but his choice of words made me turn aside from the course I had proposed myself.

"Precisely: solemnised, and, for those who form part of ecclesiastical systems, preferably so solemnised; but not made. You cannot make marriage, and whatever you cannot make may be made independently of you. It is idle, it is, believe me, sir, even insolent of you, to refuse to recognise what has been made independently of you when you admit you cannot make it yourself. It is about the one arrogance that is unpardonable. Yes——"

"You run ahead too fast, Mr. Elthorne. I have not said our holy Church cannot make marriages. Nor do I admit it either, Mr. Elthorne."

"You used the word solemnised, not made, you remember."

"If you are anxious upon a verbal——"

"Not at all. I take your instinctive choice of words because it expressed a just instinct in you."

"I don't follow you at all. But I deny the idea you are trying to attach to me. I have nothing to do with it."

"You may deny, sir, till the split of judgment, but it doesn't alter the fact. If you married, or put through all your sacred forms of marriage, a woman to a sexless person with a male resemblance, would that abide? Or if you married two who refused to ratify your solemnity of form, would that abide?"

"These things are not marriage." His pale face had become flushed as he leaned forward to confute me.

"Precisely, that's what I am saying. And all your forms and solemnities can't make them so. That's to say, marriage is a thing independent of you. Your task, sir, is to solemnise

it if the parties in whom the spiritual fact had occurred think that it needs other than its own solemnity. It is an impertinence for you to do otherwise, and I say it is an impertinence for you to try and come between Ethna and myself who have that bond, even as it was a merciless brutality in you to bully her the whole of this past night."

He sat there, drumming on the table with his fingers, flushed and annoyed, perturbed even, that I had forced the pace, and so rushed him into a corner, discomfiting him in the presence of these his parishioners. That he was so discomfited was apparent from the way he half turned his head right and left in their direction without actually looking at them. His fixed, austere countenance seemed even for a moment to be intensely malevolent. I began to be wary for an explosion that would serve, by its onset, to drive me forcibly from my ground. It came, although in its deliberate dignity it did not wear the appearance of an explosion.

"It is by such casuistry of the devil you have corrupted our child—" his gesture included the Walpoles in his reference, and so rallied them to him. "We shall resist it by our stubborn faith, and we shall save Ethna from you. By what right do you come stealing faith and innocence in this way? You shall not steal more."

I was about to thrust him out of this rhetorical evasion of the point at issue when Mrs. Walpole put me at a disadvantage by breaking in shrilly :

"And I never thought, all the time you were coming here with your soft ways and kindness, it was deceiving me you were all the time. And I helping you, unknowingly, by telling Ethna it was the kind man you were, with all your tickets for the concerts, and books for her, and all the rest of it! I didn't trust the nasty thoughts, Father, that sometimes came to me when I saw Ethna reading books she was better without, and all the time they were warnings to me—all the time they were."

"Mrs. Walpole, excuse me, I owe it to you to say that I had no thought at that time that a great love was coming to me and Ethna. Directly I did know, and at the very moment I could get the ground clear before me, I was going to tell you. You should have known to-day, except that Father Magennis broke my confidence to him. I am very sorry to cause you

any pain, and I know Ethna is, but this thing went ahead of you because it first went ahead of us."

"That is enough," said Father Magennis with an intolerable assumption of authority, rising as he spoke. "It is surely enough that you should deceive everybody without adding to it by words. Ethna will not dare to defy the Church she was bred in, the God she has always worshipped so devoutly; and we will support her faith in resisting you. That is what I wanted to tell you." He held bravely on despite all my efforts to break in, for I saw he was about to fall back on the vantage grounds of authority. "That is all. I think I may say you had better withdraw; we would wish it." He half-turned to Walpole for confirmation of his edict.

"Yes, yes, Father, whatever you say," eagerly said that worthy, rousing himself thus far. And Mrs. Walpole moved round the table towards the door.

It was an awkward moment, but I had been struggling for speech during the whole time that Father Magennis, arrayed in his full and iciest dignity, had been declaring the law to me; and I now burst in emphatically.

"I refuse to leave this house, or to leave this room, until I have seen Ethna."

"We shall call a constable," Father Magennis said in angry discomfiture.

"In that you shall please yourself; I very much regret any unpleasantness, but you must see I have a right to see Ethna." It was plain to me what their intentions were with regard to her.

I do not like to think upon the tumult that succeeded at this. All Mrs. Walpole's instincts as an outraged hostess, her probable memories as a landlady, with other inducements besides, rose to aid her tongue in anathemas on me. It would have been like any street broil (it was quite sufficiently degrading) save for a curious moral capture of the situation that helped her natural sense of dignity. It was probably Walpole's spluttered defiance of me that gave the grossness to the scene. Father Magennis himself took no part in the scene, but then neither did he attempt to allay Mrs. Walpole's anger. He stood by coldly and statuesquely.

I tried to calm this sudden storm that so curiously made

me shamefast, but Mrs. Walpole merely held the door open, and bade me go. That of course I could not do. I could not proceed with half a dozen words of speech, and I certainly could not go, while my continued presence only made her shrill anger (with Walpole for growling chorus) the worse.

Then swiftly a strained calm fell on the scene, for Ethna herself had come running in among us. She made a splendid, a tragic, figure, and I think we were all awed by her. As she looked from one to the other, she swayed as she stood, and it was plain to see that she was wrought beyond her strength, but none of us thought to go near her. Mrs. Walpole was even afraid of her (Walpole had retreated to his corner), but no one spoke a word. Poor Ethna struggled to speak, but words refused to come to her moving lips.

"My dear child, you see all the evil your errors have brought upon us." It was Father Magennis who spoke as he came towards her, in his hateful instinct to seize the advantage of a situation.

Ethna put her hands tremblingly to her face, and burst into a torrent of tears.

I tried to calm her—idly enough, for this was a matter of nervous ruin more than of a definable grief. I could have cursed the whole of them, but that would have been to make her worse.

"She shall leave with me now," I said.

"That would be impossibly wrong and cruel of you," Father Magennis said.

"What do you mean, wrong and cruel?"

"Cruel, because you cannot take her away from her guardians, and she in the state she is; wrong, because she is in no state to take her own decision."

"Oh, leave it, leave it!" Ethna burst out. "Jack, my darling, come again to-morrow, and then I'll be ready. But I must sleep, oh, I must sleep. I can't stand this, I can't, I can't."

"What she says is very wise; indeed, it is the only possible thing to do," Father Magennis said with a readiness that I could scarcely understand, distracted as I was by Ethna's collapse. And, in fact, it seemed so to me also.

"How do I know you will let me in to-morrow?"

"I pledge it."

"In faith and honour?" I had no trust in the man.

"Surely: in faith and in honour."

So I gently disengaged Ethna's quivering embrace, kissed her on her brow, and resigned her to Mrs. Walpole to lead upstairs. I went away full of distractions and foreboding. But what else was there for me to do?

X

ETHNA MAKES HER DECISION

"I ought to say immediately that Miss Cahill has decided, has, in fact, promised me, not to see you, nor hear from you, for a full year from now." So Father Magennis addressed me, a little hurriedly and precipitatedly, in that same dining-room the following morning. Mrs. Walpole had stiffly shown me in but had failed to follow me, and I hardly had seen Ethna standing beyond the gloom on the light of the window, and Father Magennis standing at the table in between, when this sentence greeted me.

I scarcely realised it. It stupefied me momentarily, and checked me. I saw Ethna turn quickly towards Father Magennis, but it seemed some minutes before she spoke.

"It oughtn't to be put like that. It's not you who ought to have said it at all, and it's not right to put it that way. You promised you would not be here when I saw Jack."

"I know, my child——"

"Will you not go?" she cried, raising her hands with that same trembling slowness to her face. "I can't stand it,

Father. You are cruel to me. I'll go out with him this minute, and let you do what you like to Auntie Walpole and all of them, if you can't keep your word to me."

He said no more, but there was a long patient malice in his glance at me as he went.

"Ethna, what does this mean?" I asked her.

"Ah, you mustn't be angry with me," she wailed. "You don't know what hardness they've given me."

"No, dear, I won't be hard. I'm sorry. But it's very bewildering. It's—staggering."

"But I shan't fail," she said, so bravely, standing erect before me with head high, and in a voice that would have been cheerful but for its obvious strain and the tremble in it. "I'll be ready in a year. Perhaps it's better like that. Do you know, I think it will show——" She hesitated a moment, trying to hold herself bravely. I should have left her to herself, but I saw tears in her eyes, that she sought to stem back, and I took her hand to caress and comfort her. Immediately the whole of the tempest she had sought to hold back, exploded. The heat of it scorched her very tears, for she shook as in an ague, seeming more as though she had a seizure than as though she were in violent grief. I laid her on the worn old sofa, for I had no one to turn to for assistance. Yet she became calm again as suddenly as the storm had swept upon her.

I feared greatly for her violent alternations; her brain seemed the momentary expression of the revolving areas of her soul, and her frame was being worn by the fierce and differing strains.

"Ethna, my dearest, it shall be as you wish. Nothing can change me, and I have the faith in you I have in myself. But what is gained by wasting a year in this way? Won't it only mean all the struggle over again then?"

"It's to save them, that's all it is. She gets some of her people from him, and he says he'll interdict her because it's her training led me into sin. That's what he says, anyway. What can he do? I should let him try, I shouldn't flinch because he talked in threats, for he couldn't keep the sacraments from her. But she's a poor thing, and she's afraid. Anyway, it's a hard struggle for her."

"Yes?"

"Oh, and he promised he wouldn't if I didn't see you, or write to you and do anything, for a year, whatever I might do at that time. So I promised."

There surely never were words spoken with such utter dejection. She had grown quite listless and dulled.

"They will only try to put you more severely under their order of things, so as to drive us apart, you know!"

"I suppose so. He promised he wouldn't."

"Are you still thinking of his word to you? Apart from them, what, dear, would be your own resolve? I want to have something to go away upon."

"It's a dreadful thing to have the curse of God put upon you," she said in the same dulled way.

In a sudden twitch of irritation (for I was very deeply distressed) I thought of challenging her love for me. But that would have been to act like an unlearned youth, for one heart does not love another less because it loves a sense of duty more. So I checked myself in silence, and bowed my head.

"Not that he can really," she continued. "God can't bring life to me, and then suddenly damn it like that. How can He? And He can't use a cruel, soft cat of a man like Father is turning out to be, to curse me who do mean to glorify Him. Oh, Jack, you've been lovely to me, and I do thank God for having found you for all this bother of things. Oh, I do, I do. You've made a woman of me that was only angry and silly before; and I will be worthy of you all this year, I will; and I will come to you at the end, I promise. Oh, I wish it were here now. You don't know what it means to me. It's like just going to walk down a long, dark gully with no light at all in it. But I shall come out of it again. You'll help me, won't you, dear?"

"My dearest, as you wish and as you will."

We spoke many soft and sacred things together, while I sought to keep away any recurrence of violence in her. And when I went away, after her clinging, agonised, pure pain of spirit, it all seemed strangely unreal and like a dream. It was like the numbness succeeding to a caning at school. The memory of our talk, as I went up the street, appeared even stupidly tame, and insufficient. It seemed more

like an anticlimax than a real occurrence, except for a far-away sound of weeping in it, of weeping never to be quenched.

XI

EVERYTHING FAILS ME

The plover and curlew were crying above the hills when I returned to my cottage ; the voice of the wild geese was soon heard, like a breathless moan in the air above, as they passed to their roosting quarters in the wild dark splendour of the autumn dusk ; and all the mountains were trembling in that new tenderness of power that comes upon them with the return of their birds. I felt it all, but as in some remote suburb of my being. Life and Being were around me in power. I felt it all, it could not be denied, but it seemed to affect me little, and brought me no comfort.

In the morning the wild geese woke me as they passed overhead (they always flew lower in the dusk of dawn), and I was instantly awake. Habit reasserted itself. But, once awake, knowledge came, and I lay there in dejection, thinking out my tortured dreams of the night. I did not rise. What object was there in rising ? It only meant passing through a day that mattered little one way or another in the sum of things. And when later I went forth and trod upon Guala, I felt that my return was known, but it did not wake me to delight. I was grateful, of course, dumbly grateful for this high company where my presence was not unwelcome, but it was not able to pierce the dejection that encased as a harness of steel.

In the war of self I tried to arouse myself, but nowhere

could I find an instrument with which to do so. What friends had I? Ramsay and Tim were both alienated from me by this new turn in my affairs that they had not been able to conceive. Frank: what was he? A kind of man who burrowed in the indecencies of commerce, who emerged to the light of day to blink half-recognisingly at me, run round energetically in futile circles, and plunge again into his burrowing. Rhoda was dead to me: dead even to anger and resentment. Who else was there? Ethna?—would she be able to endure continued oppression for a whole year at her changeful time of years? I very much doubted it. And what else had I? Coming here I had cut myself away from other people—certainly with small loss to myself judging by the defection of these others who had been so much more to me. I turned down the books I had written, and laughed at them. They might be good or bad, but who read them? Sweat of my soul they certainly were, but who could have answered me how many I had written, and which they were, and what in the name of conscience they meant? I was only one of the thousands of others who piled up writings to feed their own self-conceit, who received no payment for them, but to whom the name in print on the back side of a book was all in all, let the print be in Syriac if it would.

What other book could I write if I were put to it? None, as I well knew: my brain was dead to ideas. And that was the plain, short judgment on the rest of the matter. I had only gone on writing so long as I had ideas, so long as I could beat up subject-matter. It certainly had the merit of being honourable, but in what other way did it differ from Frank's manner of living?

I had played a game with Life, and I had lost—lost so heavily that nothing more remained to play with. There was no one to blame but myself. It was I who married Rhoda, it was I who parted from her on a subject that, as I looked at my books, seemed as extravagant as stupid. She too published books, and they sold—that was one thing she could say. It was even I who originated Ermott Jacob. I had made all the whips that came in turn across my shoulders. It was I who held aloof from the many, thinking that precious friends were better than a multitude. It was I who elected to come out into this wonderful Temple of the Highest,

where I now wandered, empty and disconsolate. I had not had a hand dealt me, I had been given a whole pack, had chosen my own hand, and had lost on every card I had played.

Ethna I could scarce bear to think of. If I blamed myself anywhere I blamed myself there. I cursed myself for my folly. What was the point in living a strenuous, battling, dogged and disappointed life till forty if one could not by that time acquire sufficient common sense to see that that kind of dalliance (helping her, I had called it in my fatuity) would end in just such complications as had chanced? What had I, whom the State had bound for life, to do walking abroad, pretending I was out of serfdom, and getting dear souls into misery who had till then known such distance from misery as the earth may give?

It was only when I thought of her that my bitterness rose out of its dull lethargy, but it rose into a torment that was almost past endurance. Either I would think of Father Magennis harrying her in his merciless, crafty way: when I would rise up with a sharp cry as though a weapon had been thrust into me. Or I would think of her longing for me till her hunger wore away her physical endurance: when the pity and answering hunger would make the great spaces of the hills too small for my complaint. Or I would think of her being crushed by the opposition, or outgrowing the memory as weeks went by, or shrinking from the ordeal when the customary routine of life began to subdue her to its habit: when the blackest despair took me, though I ever justified her, seeing that I had come to look upon myself with disillusioned eyes.

So the weeks went by, and my cottage saw much bitter, listless brooding. Reading itself defied me. Rhoda had, the previous Christmas, sent me a wonderfully bound copy of Marcus Aurelius; and, as I cut the flyleaf out in the determination to give the book to Martin O'Hara, I looked within it. But this sleek, rich emperor, looking out upon the world with his sleek, rich eyes, and calling his outlook stoical, exasperated me. Men in his position do not find wisdom, they get others to help them make a counterfeit of it, and they never learn that it is a counterfeit, for there are none to tell them the truth. Men only read these Meditations because their writer was an

emperor, and because it is as rare to find an exalted person thinking as it is to find him blacking his own boots: not because of any proved wisdom in them. The need for quotations in calendars (never at any risk to be put into practice, they have not that sting or urgency) keeps them alive. I did not give the book to Martin. I flung it away in the heather.

I turned to Shelley. Beautiful Shelley! He did not exasperate, but he failed to comfort; he created a pain that was too near tears, and I put him away tenderly. Keats I did not try, he was not central enough. But Carlyle helped me. His great humanity, and bewildering vision, came very near me, yet it was a moment's quickness of the blood, for soon even the wonderful pageant of his French Revolution became like a troop of soldiers passing in music and with banners through the muddled dullness of a remembered dream. I did not go further than Carlyle. Father Hefferan lent me Newman, but I carefully returned it in a fortnight without reading it. Newman is a spiritual æsthete, and as unhealthy, and as affected, as the average æsthete. Kingsley was a grocer beside him, but Kingsley was human.

Father Hefferan's visits were a puzzling matter. His round, weather-beaten moon of a face, with light-blue eyes that laughed and twinkled in the expanse of redness, seemed the last remove from intrigue, yet his visits could not but remind me of Father Magennis, lean and disciplinary in his stuffy room in Dublin. Father Hefferan, though his zeal was matchless, never discussed his creed with me. He avoided it, rather. And so his new attention made me wonder.

For in my listless dejection I had cut myself away from everybody. A wall seemed to have arisen between myself and the people of the village. Whether it was my fancy or not, I cannot say, but it certainly seemed to me that their very salutations in the street, on the rare occasions when I met any of them, were cold and forbidding, with the result that I avoided them, even as I have no doubt they avoided me.

Martin O'Hara himself I had not seen since my return, and so I was the more surprised when one evening he came in to see me.

"It's a wild night," I said.

"A wilder I haven't seen, though the years are white on me."

He was the only man in the place who really enjoyed my tobacco, and we smoked in silence for a long while.

"Did I ever tell you," he said at last, "of the man who got lost once on the big hills behind this place?"

"You never did."

"A good man, he was, and never a man to flinch at the troubles of things. But his wife died—a grand, good woman she was too: she died in the pains of giving birth, and the doctor never came though he was called many times, and the woman of the place was visiting her friends in Kerry. And so she died, and he went wandering the big hills in the pity of it. He was a decent, God-fearing man, but he was 'away' for a long time. It was plain to see he was 'away,' the way he'd look at you, and he walking through the village itself. The people turned against him, for he brought a curse on the place."

I began to see the drift of his words, and wished to ask him more precisely upon them. But I knew well that would greatly offend his delicacy, without succeeding in my intention.

So I lifted the question into the general: "How should a man's private troubles have anything to do with the people?" I asked.

But Martin was not to be drawn from his particular instance: "He was a decent man," said he, "but the good people ravaged him, coming upon him in his great sorrow. So he was 'away,' and when he turned his feet against his friends they put a great anger on him. He set out to go to the United States of America, but he was drowned on the way."

XII

THE KNOCK UPON THE WINDOW

Though I tried hard to wring something more definite from him I failed utterly. I only succeeded in getting fuller details of the tragedy that evidently had occurred. With an aloof dignity that nothing could break, Martin baffled all my attempts with simple adroitness, and when at last he went, he left with me a delicate sense of what he had come to deliver.

The result was that the following day I took out my rucksack, passed over Guala away from the village, struck down southward, and then turned about towards Blacksod Bay. The gale was abating, and torn fragments of cloud were being blown along the hilltops beneath a clear sky, as I lifted up my head and took the wind upon my face. None knew of my departure. I went silently and without advice.

I realised with difficulty that my dejection had weakened me physically. After I had gone a few miles I discovered that I could continue walking only with the greatest difficulty. It puzzled me at first, since I do not usually tire with walking. But I forced myself to continue, and found that the monotony of tramping attuned me better than anything else could.

It was within a few days of Christmas, and before I had gone a week on my way the weather turned very black. Moreover, the habit of walking had begun to master my mind, and subdue it, so that in the end I became a kind of walking automaton : thinking nothing, feeling nothing, knowing nothing—but only walking, for ever walking.

Christmas passed almost without my knowledge. In the white moonlight one evening the sight of candles winking in every window made me aware that I was nearing the threshold of the day. I was royally entertained that night, and when I went off the following morning, with hearty greetings in my ear, no charge would be taken from me for my night's keep. A mile along the road the memory had passed from me, and I had grown into the steady comfort of walking onward.

Then when, as I came towards Achill, the country grew gaunt

and severe, Owen Dubh standing before me in its strange austerity, my mood became uplifted, and a change came over me. The country became like a renunciation that had opened a whole world of wonder. There were none of the civil parts of a picture, there was no invitation or calm in the landscape: it was challenging, arrestive, defiant even, saturated in a dim, mystical light. It was, I felt at once, full of mighty presences. To those who knew them not they meant nothing either way. To those who did, they were a challenge, possibly a great danger. That challenge was bracing, and as I went forward into it I was exalted.

It was so I went past Mallaranney, down to Carraun, crossed by curragh one sunlit frosty morning into Achill, and went round by way of the coast, over the hills or by the road, to Dooega, and so on to Keel. So I went on westward, standing on those great cliffs while the illimitable waters of the ocean were leaping in the cold sunlight beneath me. I returned by Dugort, which was an incursion of mere civilisation, and which I soon left. Then the weather turned wild, the long streamers of rain driving over the low bogs above Bonnacurry as, to a calmer tune of my brain, I turned back towards my glen.

Strangely a new mood had taken possession of me, and it was one of expectancy. There was no excitement in it; it was like waiting for something inevitable, that I knew was inevitable, though I knew not what it was. It was as if some part of me had taken possession of the future, and could not send back to my brain more than a sense of what it knew. It was, I know, something extraordinarily exalted, and the sharp response of the people to me on my return made me realise that it was something wholesome, and maybe even dignified.

In half a dream I passed the weeks—waiting. It was a queer and whimsical mood, part melancholy and part a tender looking into the darkness to see what should emerge. I have no difficulty in transporting myself into any part of my life, but those three or four weeks baffle me. It must have been a kind of somnambulism, and it seems it must have been gracious, for several have spoken to me of my very great tenderness with them during this time. But I have the vaguest memory of myself, probably because of the sharpness of what ensued.

One evening I sat so, contemplatively before a fire well banked with turf. For it was a terrible night. It had been furious and wild for nearly a week, sleet and rain driving down upon a north-easterly wind. All the mountains were capped with snow, but in the valleys the sleet was soft as it was driven before the hurricane of wind. I could hear nothing but the shriek of the wind against the cottage and the hiss and sting of the sleet against the window. It was such a wind as I had never known, save when it came from the south-west, and it was bleak as though it were full of knives. Now and then I could hear the wail of the heather outside, or the cry of a bird that had been swept from cover, but these were in lulls, for the wind made the cottage the special point of its onset, shrieking and crying around it. My cottage was the only obstruction on the mountain side, and when earlier I had tried to venture out I had found it almost impossible to stand.

And as I sat, quietly smoking, in the attentiveness of waking dream that had lately marked me, presently I heard a knock upon the window. I turned round wonderingly, when it was repeated, and my name was called in a voice that made my heart to beat heavily. In wild concern I flung wide the door and saw, in the light streaming from the window, a form huddled before it.

"Ethna, Ethna!" I cried. "Whatever are you doing here?"

"Oh, Jack," she said, feebly enough, "I thought I would never find you."

"My darling! but what made you come, and how did you come?"

"I got lost so many times. I nearly went to sleep in the heather."

It was pitiful beyond all words: she clung to me so pathetically, she was so frail and thin. And she stood already in a pool of water, so wet was she.

I poured her out a glass of hot brandy, and drew her to the fire. It was pitiable to see the way she shuddered in its heat.

"Have you no clothes?" I asked her.

"I have nothing. Oh, Jack, I came straight to you."

Like a starveling coming to shelter she lifted her lips to

mine. We had not kissed yet. And when we kissed she broke down into sobs, into a torrent of weeping, so unendurable seemed that moment. I was distracted with pain. Physically and mentally she seemed at the very end of her resources.

I drew out my night suit before the fire, and a large towel, and I made her dry herself and get into my bed, while I turned away. Presently she called me, and I went to her.

"My dearest," I said, "it's very dear to think of you coming to me like this; but how, why, what made you come?"

"I couldn't stand it, I couldn't. I was crying for you all the time, my heart was, and they've been so terrible to me since Christmas, troubling me all the time. I couldn't bear it, with that aching in me all the time, and their troubling me. So I walked out this morning, do you know, while they were talking to me, and went straight to the station."

"That man-devil Magennis, I suppose!"

"He has been so cruel to me, Jack. Hadn't I pain enough without his troublesome words? And the days were so dark and wild, and so cold in my room, where I was, to get away from them. And I was so crying and aching for you. Oh, I was so glad to think I was going to look on you. But then I thought I wouldn't after all, the wind beat against me so."

A terrible thought struck me: "Ethna—my dear—you didn't walk from Castlebar!"

"I took a car a little bit of the way. But I haven't any money, coming out the way I did."

"My poor little woman! I could have paid this end!"

"I didn't think of that. I was only thinking of getting to see you, and to be with you. And, Jack, the wind beat so, I thought I would never be able to come. It beat me back; it kept beating me back; and I got so tired. It blew me back; and I kept sitting down till I thought I would have to give it up."

"My dearest, my dearest."

"Then when I got to the village they told me I had still to go on. I cried then, Jack; and a man wanted to bring me

up. But I wouldn't let him. Then I lost my way up in the heather ; and I didn't know what to do, till I saw the light in the valley. I went back to the village then ; and I was crying because it was all a spent journey. Somebody put me right again ; but I got lost again in the heather. You see, the wind blew me all out of the way, and the heather caught me, and tripped me ; and my skirt was wet ; and I was so hopeless. I think I went to sleep then, in the heather : I only wanted everything to be forgotten, for it seemed I was never to see you, and that was so terrible. But I forced myself to go on. I crawled down low, so as to get out of the wind. And I came on the path again, that way ; and I came along the path for a long, long time, when I saw the window—and I knew it must be you. I knew it had to be you, for I couldn't go any more at all—Oh, Jack, I am glad to see you."

I bowed my head upon the bed : it was awful to think of her, so frail and thin, battling her way through that terrible journey of storm to come to me.

"Poor old Jack," I heard her voice. "I am sorry if I've troubled you. But I wanted to tell you ; I kept saying to myself all the way that I should tell you, so that you could see how much I wanted you."

"Dear, I never doubted that."

"The way I sent you away from me ! It was that troubled me all times. But it was Father Magennis's doing ; I was so worried and vexed."

"Ethna, you mustn't talk like that. Whatever you did I never doubted you."

"Do you really mean that ? "

"Dear, dear girl ! You needn't have reproached yourself. If I had only thought you had——"

"You're very kind to me, Jack ; and you do comfort me so."

"Dearest ! and if you had got lost, and gone astray upon the bogs."

"It was light that part of the journey."

"My darling, my darling ! "

She was so thin, so fragile, so tired, lying there in my bed, it was pitiful to look upon her. By this time I had some broth ready for her, which she only ate at my desire, for she was tired and foredone beyond hunger. I had put brandy

in her tea, and presently her eyes grew heavy, and, even as I watched her, she sank into a heavy sleep.

So I gently stacked up a large fire, and, turning the light out, slept in my chair. But I had difficulty in disengaging her hand, which was closed in a fierce grip upon my own.

XIII

THE STRUGGLE AT THE THRESHOLD

The storm raged furiously all the following day, and the cottage shook in the anger of the wind. Ethna had been awake before me, and I had drawn myself out of my long chair to see her looking on me in the white dawn. There was an inexpressible yearning in her eyes.

"My dearest," I said, going to her, "how do you feel this morning?"

She said nothing, but her eyes searched my face. It was terrible for me to see how thin and haggard she was, and there was a flush on each cheek that I little liked. But such things were only noticed incidentally, for, like a river running calmly in the quivering fulness of its joy, we were rejoicing each of us in the actual presence of the other. I laid her dear hair back upon the pillow, and she caressed me, with an intimate gentleness such as no other joy on earth can rival.

Yet she was ill, and sorely ill. Her temperature was high, and there were signs of pulmonary congestion. I did not know what to do, for I could not very well leave her. But I had a curious knowledge of how to treat straightforward illness, and had been of some slight service in the village in helping those that fell ill. So I tended her.

Later in the day William Barrett came up to see me. "A lady was seeking the way to find you in the storm yesterday," he said. "I directed her surely, but she wouldn't let me help her the way up the hill."

"Yes," I said, hiding my diffidence. "She is within now. She had a bad journey in the storm. She is ill now, I am sorry to say." This was the difficulty I had not yet taken into my immediate reckoning. Ordinarily I would have left the glen promptly, but Ethna's illness and high fever prohibited that.

"Faith, I'm sorry to hear that," said he. "But you're the right man to help her in any illness, God bless you. You'll do her a power more good than any doctor."

"I'm afraid it'll be a matter for the doctor, for all that, William." For, indeed, Ethna was very restless, and her lungs were evidently giving her increasing trouble.

"If you'd let me go bring the doctor, Mr. Elthorne, I should be proud. As always I should serve your happiness." There was a curious timidity in his attitude that puzzled me.

"It would be very good of you, William."

"Not at all, sir. There would be many glad to do it for you. And there would be many to wish you a great prosperity in the future of time, and to bid your lady heartily welcome."

I puzzled for a long time over his words before it began to dawn upon my mind what he meant.

"Dearest," I said to Ethna, "I believe the people here think you are my wife come to me in the end of all—as indeed you are, God knows."

She put out her hand to take mine and caress it, while she smiled happily at me. It was the sudden springing up of deep contentment through her feverish restlessness, for she was getting worse, and the shrieking wind and rain made sleep impossible for her in that state.

Late in the afternoon Barrett drove the doctor over from Castlebar in his car. He declared the obvious, that Ethna was at the beginnings of pneumonia, and that the symptoms seemed to indicate a difficult time. Physically she was very weak, mentally she had been distraught, and nervously spent, with the result that the long strain and exposure coming upon all this had played havoc with her.

So she lay, and for weeks it seemed as though I had only

gained her to lose her. Night and day I tended her, distraught to think she might slip away thus, and miss the dear happiness she had struggled so painfully to reach. Night and day it seemed that nothing could save that struggling, hard-breathing form from releasing its anguished spirit. It was only my voice that held her, that calmed her. I would speak her name gently by her bedside for hours at a time, and she would turn to me, smiling, and take my hand in hers. Or I would read her poetry, which, in her state, she might not understand, but the cadence of which, in my voice, arrested her and calmed her. The deep, deep peace of such hours was more curative than any physician's craft could be.

They were long, anxious weeks. I was often saturated with a sleep I could not suffer myself, and she, for days together, would keep a close struggle for breath. But there was something in them that made them eloquent with a joy beyond the expression of language. The very touch of our hands together was a communion fuller of meaning than words, or even music, could have uttered. It was the blessedness of fulfilment, flowing from the bosom of God.

April had come bleakly into the valley before she had even begun to be convalescent. A few scattered warm days in that month mended her greatly, but it was already obvious that she would never be the same again, that she would never be sound of lung. The glory of the summer helped her. Indeed, had it not been for that wonderful summer, another tale would have been told. It helped her to pull back to health again, however insecure that health might be, and it gave us each a new measure of life.

XIV

THE HOUSE OF FULFILMENT

The wonder of the years that followed is incommunicable. They were the very beauty of fulfilment. In all the changes that had come upon Ethna during the time I had known her, none were so beautiful as that which now transformed her. Her frailty of health was not sufficient to contain the eager strength that till then had marked her spirit, the impatient directness that had characterised her, and, as though tempering itself to these new conditions, it turned itself to a beautiful and almost ethereal delicacy, that arrayed her like a light falling on her from a world beyond view. Our love grew up between us like a wonderful inheritance of peaceful ecstasy. Its fragrance floated about us like an infinite memory, that was also an infinite achievement. The past and the future were absolved in it.

There was scarcely a consecutive five minutes of the day or night in which we were not in each other's company. We each turned expectantly to the other, as a flower turns expectantly to the sun to fulfil its life. Each, in the beautiful accuracy of the old phrase, was the light of the other's eye. The touch of hand in hand, as we walked the hills, set music ringing in the world of spirit that made speech superfluous. The wild light of first love paled by contrast, and where the one tends to fret itself into satiety, the other was proud and patient and contented.

Sometimes I would sit and watch her as she moved about the cottage at work. She might turn about in a smile of response, but more usually she would move in the happy consciousness of the glance, delighting in it, bathing in it, as in a beam of warm light that fell upon her. And that became the symbol of our interchange. There was no straining, no exertion, in it; it was a simple flowing forth. It was spontaneous and ecstatic; it enveloped us as a flame of perfume, merging us in it, and dissolving us in a calm that was the crown on the brow of wildness. There were moments when I felt a thankfulness for this great joy that was humble and glad; but, so true was its fulfilment, my more usual mood was one of high acceptance of a divine order of things.

Ethna was simple and fragrant in her joy. There could be nothing so gratifying in its effect on me, as her expanding delight in my mere presence ; but in her it was something as lovely as a flower. It was reflected in her music. I had provided her with a violin ; and her playing of the simplest tunes transmuted them with the radiance of her own joy. Her ill-health, her weakness, her increasing frailty, that broke out continually in her and kept her to her bed, seemed wholly unable even to indent the edge of that perfect round of joy.

That our love must have been something exceedingly beautiful was obvious from the way in which the people of the village would look out for us, and call the " blessings of the good God on the two of you, for surely you do be throwing a wonderful sunlight about you as you come and go." They loved Ethna, and she loved helping them and nursing them and mixing her irradiant life of joy with their sterner, more stoic way. She brought her lyric to the narrative, till the whole became one flowering song.

It was this, possibly, that saved us from one peril. Soon after Ethna's convalescence Father Hefferan came up to see me. He enquired after her, wished her good health, and very soon gave me to know that he knew of our relationship. I had expected him long before, and had come to the conclusion that the long arm was not to reach us. The delay puzzled me, but there was no purpose in seeking to frustrate the issue. So I took him out upon the hills, and in the evening of the day told him the whole of my story.

" Faith, I'm sorry indeed for you," he said then, " but will you tell me, Mr. Elthorne, what I can do under the circumstances, as a priest of the Catholic Church, other than to warn my flock against you ? I needn't tell you what a grief it would be to me, for I know you to be a good man, and I have a powerful respect for you. But there you are, don't you see ! "

" And may I ask you, Father Hefferan, what right or vocation have you to call down judgment, that might very easily wound considerably, without any knowledge of the case ? "

" I know the facts of the case."

" Facts ? What facts ? What are the facts ? "

" Surely, haven't you yeself just told me ? " His round,

weather-beaten face seemed to grow yet rounder in astonishment.

"Words you put on a bit of paper, or hear in your listening ear, aren't facts, Father. They are only memories of facts. Facts are the things that are exhaled in daily life, they are the fragrances, the results, of spiritual permutations, of deeds. You know nothing of the facts of our case till you have watched our lives, and their results on the lives of those we meet. If you took my advice you would watch, you would observe thinkingly, and not take a hasty decision that will be weighed by a higher authority than ecclesiastical opinions."

I refused to say more to him, but left him with that. The subject was never referred to again between us. I do not know what action he took, or how he avoided action. I can only guess by an incident that occurred many months later. He used often to come up to see us, though generally of an evening. I noticed that he chose the darker hours to come up the hill, and I felt tacitly that he did not wish a return visit. Once, however, I suggested such a visit. His reply was significant. He smiled mischievously, reservedly, and said: "That should surely be a difficult thing for me to ask you to do, seeing that I have no knowledge but that you left this valley, which would have been a most natural thing for you to do in your circumstances."

So we were left undisturbed, and a renewed intimacy with the people of the valley was the result. It was an intimacy where Ethna led me into a whole new world of experience. I cannot say exactly where, or how. I had always lived in fraternity with the people, and had always tried to render them what service I could. She seemed only to continue this. But she widened and deepened the groove till it opened into a new world. Humanity became a unity then. Services became no mere things done for others; they turned, in the completest sense, into things done unto oneself. One enriched one's own blood with them. They sent a new light into the eye, a new colour into the cheek. It was a kind of completion of oneself: as it were an intense and vital personality being caught up into a terrific impersonality, where every act was a pure ecstasy.

The mighty beings of the hills, and the great, throbbing rhythms, coming up from the heart of the dear mother, Earth,

had abstracted me in the past, had seemed a separate exercise of Knowledge ; but Ethna now spun the more various thread-work of humanity through this texture, making the whole a splendid brocade of Life. It seems a sufficiently obvious thing to do. Yet, though I had forgotten more of humanity than she had ever learnt, she gave this simple and obvious thing a vivid new significance. She did it by the native instinct of her soul. It had been for all time true to her, and was above what Time could teach, though Time might easily have marred or ruined it.

And this simple rightness of hers made her at once at home when I took her up among the hills. Sometimes as we sat on Guala she would suddenly, impulsively, lay her cheek affectionately against the mountain side ; and then as suddenly sit upright again, with a curious look of awe upon her face, as though she had been surprised into something like indignity in the presence of majesty. Always, as we went so, she was impulsive and cognisant, never irked by long continued silences, finding them full of speech rather, and the completest companionship. I was necessary to her at such times, but I was not all ; and she soon became necessary to me, for she brought a new revelation into the communion, gave it a new fragrance and receptive music. That was one of the strangest of things, for she thereby became indispensable to me, and to say that is to say that our union, whatever might chance, was irrefragable. And yet it was not merely assonance that was won. It was curious to see how differently this inner world of reality struck along the lines of her receptivity. It is in spiritual things as it is in material. No two eyes see the same blade of grass ; its shape, its colour, its significance, are determined by the personality, and none may know what it is in itself. It is in the minds of men that knowledge exists ; and therefore there are as many material worlds as there are minds of men. So in the inner world of reality. Guala was a different thing to Ethna from what it had ever been to me. The majestic powers and presences of earth were less august to her, more delicate. Whatever they were in themselves it is impossible to tell (just as it is impossible to tell the hue or fragrance of any rose) ; and it is the less easy to tell since they lay so much beyond the scope of the reasoning and thinking mind ; but, as they lived their

high ways, the intuitive intelligence had knowledge of them, and, as we recreated them under the conditions of our temperaments, a vivid communion was the result. But the thing so perplexing to say was just this: that we lent each other our differing knowledge (though no word was spoken), and a new, unified knowledge grew up, greater than that either of us could have perceived. And the new dazzling wonder was this: that these powers and presences themselves began to fall away. We began, by right of access somehow mysteriously achieved on our behalf, to approach nearer the Central Magnificence, Him Whom we call God, than they ever could. They were ranged about the Central Magnificence, full of majesty, of terror, and of loveliness, with set places continually: we, though curiously less than they, were yet curiously more, and could go on within circle after circle in the whiter and whiter light.

It was this last new experience that began to absorb our spiritual travail. It is a difficult thing to speak of, for the consciousness of it made us feel that Life was to be renewed upon some higher plane for its more adequate continuance. It was not something independent of this world of appearances. The world of appearances was merged in it, was part of it. Just as a square, being of two dimensions, is one of the sides of a cube, which is of three, and at one time masks it and reveals it, so this three-dimensional world of appearances was one of the aspects of the other world beyond, masking it and revealing. At times one could catch it, as it were, at an angle, and then the side that had slightly turned away seemed like a monstrous illusion.

Usually this was a pure realisation, with nothing definite to account for the working of the imaginative Knowledge. Indeed, it would scarcely be intelligible that the world of appearance would itself demonstrate its insufficiency to mask the bigger thing of which it was an aspect. Yet once or twice it did so, and the veil itself displayed its rents in itself.

Once Ethna and myself were sitting on Guala idly watching a couple of men loading a cart with turf. One man was throwing the turf, in blocks of four, to the other, who caught them from him, turned, threw his burden along the cart, and then turned about to receive the next flight. As we sat we could see down the whole length of the cart. We saw the first

man throw the sods of turf, and the second man receive them. We saw the second man turn about and throw the turf into the cart, where it fell and distributed itself soundlessly, as in a picture-show. Then we saw him turn about, and, when the next lot was well in the air, we heard the first lot fall and bounce along the wooden floor of the cart. This went on continuously, and presently the extraordinary feeling grew on me that I was looking at some part of the show of things where the machinery did not quite fit, and where, through the chink between, I could see the world beyond, dark, with rolling waves of light. Everything suddenly became bewilderingly unsubstantial. The turf fell soundlessly along the cart; a sound of turf rumbling upon a wooden floor came a long time later, without any assignable cause; and between the two the reeling imagination fell. The solid-seeming earth became a whirling congregation of discharging forces; the form of everything faded away, like a diminishing cloud; and swift radiations from spiritual intelligences catapulted through space in their stead. Force, that is the basis of matter, became the natural emanations, the thoughts, very possibly, of majestic Beings, who dwelt in a wide illimitable space where omnipresence was almost a reality. These emanations, in some outer court, took visible shape: here they were power and joy. With one such Being, forceful and exquisitely delicate, I seemed, in a curiously helpful interchange, to be changing and ever changing, the fact of that change whirling me nearer the white fire of an incommunicable loveliness, the Unborn and Eternal Beauty Himself.

A trance, a dreaming whimsey, some will call it; others, a veritable experience outside the conditions of Time. I know that I found myself looking in Ethna's white, strained face, in her trance-wide, vacant eyes, with my hand in hers. The cart and turf-gatherers were gone. We two went down the hill. We did not speak of it. Speech is for terrestrial conditions, and we used it for terrestrial things. All beyond that was knowledge, and did not need words. Communion does not need communication.

Moments such as these were not infrequent between us. They reconciled me to her increasing fragility. Indeed, sometimes they made it seem inevitable. For she never truly recovered from her illness. The heat of that first summer,

there is no doubt, saved her, but when the winter came again I nursed her feveredly, fearing lest she should not survive it. She would not hear of moving away, though, ever against my purest instincts, I urged her that we should do so. Frank, very royally, wrote offering, indeed urging, a winter in Italy, but she would not be moved. She declared she belonged to Gleann-na-Siothchana, and I knew she was right.

Yet it was not easy to see her holding life more and more loosely. In moments of great spiritual expression I did not heed it, for I knew that nothing could quench our communion, and that nothing could mar our mutual aid eternally given. But in hours of depression the sight of her increasing physical delicacy pierced me through and through. She knew it, she knew it as soon as I experienced it, and it was dear beyond all thought to see the way in which she set out to soothe me, and to cheat me away from the thought.

She was wide-eyed, and I was wide-eyed. We were walking to an assured end, and there was no disguising the fact that it was a near end. It made us very anxious to wring the utmost out of the hours that passed, and yet with one such as she, with her boundless spontaneity, it was impossible to make this a deliberate attempt. So a tender joy was constantly enkindled between us by an effort that never rose into the world of consciousness, and the river of our life ran deeply forward, in full ease.

To my great joy the second winter did not affect her as much as I had feared it would. But the summer that followed was bleak and wet, and, guard her as I would, she was continuously feverish. It was not easy to know her body's illness, for her gaiety rose unconquerably through it. Our very joy in each other seemed selfishly to blot out knowledge of things contrary to it. Yet I watched carefully, never ceasing my guard of her. It was so all through the winter that followed, and I thought I had defended her well, and seen it safely away, when its sudden return for a wild and tempestuous fortnight in April laid her low. And when she had been in bed a week, despite the fair words of the doctor, we knew what none could tell us. We looked in each other's eyes: and we knew. It was there, set and inevitable, between us, and the gravity of a great sorrow came over us.

"Dear Jack," she said, "I am content. I never thought

there could have been three years like these. How you have lifted me up ! To think of the angry, hopeless thing I was ! ”

“ Dear Ethna ! The Presence knows it was you who lifted me up. I believe I was a misanthrope. ”

“ Thank you, dear Jack, for all this happiness. Oh, how I thank you ! ”

“ Don’t, Ethna ! don’t ! ”

“ It is a Presence, Jack. ”

“ He is present now, and I dare not begrudge you. But how I would if I dared ! ”

“ I shall always be with you, you know, always, Jack ; you know that ; it must be so now, you see. ”

“ I know, I know. But just the touch of your hand, the smile of your eyes, the sun on your hair ! My dear, my dear ! ”

In those days she went quietly away. She should have been unconscious, her fever was so high. But her eye was on mine, her hand was in mine, and we knew each other well.

XV

THE WAY ONWARD

She was buried on the hillside at the back of the cottage ; and the heather was carefully laid back over the place even as it had been before. It says much for the love she had won that none regarded it as at all amiss that she should not be buried in consecrated ground. I had wished to avoid a ceremony ; but it became inevitable. It is not things done over the dead clay, but things enacted in the live spirit, that matter ; but Father Hefferan came up to see me, and it was evident that he expected some such suggestion. It was, indeed, noble

of him, for it meant very much to him under the circumstances. And the offer was freely given, without apology or cavil.

So a special version of the service was read over the coffin after mass on the Sunday morning ; and when the turf was laid back over the place, I stayed on the hillside, while the people streamed back towards the village, the women keening as they went. At my wish none had come up to " wake " her. I had " waked " her alone. And now, when all remains were put out of sight, I walked the hillside in an utter loneliness.

I knew her company with me ; but it seemed so very insufficient. I made a gesture as though to take her hand, as I used to when she walked beside me, and it stamped the futility of consolation. The voice was silent, the eyes no longer leapt to mine, that trembling body, so precious to embrace, meant nothing now ; and it was not easy to conceive the higher companionship.

It was not wise to hasten that conception. If it were right it would come. Meanwhile sorrow must have its day ; and it coarsens and brutalises a man to refuse its hour. Its poignancy is its own purgation ; and better disciplines than the rough hand that would check it or the cynic thought that fears a healthy emotion.

Yet there was one manifest fault I had to avoid ; and I soon discovered it. I began to treasure relics ; and when one opens the door to sentimentality, emotion soon flies. So I put them all away. I wished to find communion with the unfleshed Ethna wherever she had her larger life, but I did not want to conjure up a shadow from my own sorrowing and mistake the one for the other. It is the old distinction, in fact, between the fancy and the imagination. The imagination discovers absolute Beauty ; the fancy constructs a playful prettiness. The imagination finds ; the fancy pretends. The one finds the eternal truth, the other makes the eternal falsehood. If I gave my fancy play, it would, out of my sorrow, construct a sentimental shade, and with it for ever bar my access to her who lately lived with me in Time. So I put away all relics ; I burned every memento, till there was nothing left of her for me to depend upon ; I spent my time much upon the hills, thinking of her, not as my companion who had been, but as my companion who was. And, in the

wise way she had taught me, I gave myself freely to the people, worked with them on the land, and took from them in fair recompense what I wanted of its produce for my needs.

So I came to a vision of things that filled me with wonder. And my days and progress passed unchallenged, until the incident that started me writing these pages.

It was nearly two years after Ethna's passage, and a shrewd April day, when as I came down from the hills in the early afternoon I was surprised to see a strange car before my cottage. Both James Ramsay and Tim Larkin had been with me the previous year, and were to be with me later in this, so I knew it could not be either of them. I thought of Frank, and hastened on. When I entered my cottage, to my considerable perturbation I saw Rhoda sitting there.

"You are surprised to see me?" she said. She seemed younger than when I had last seen her, and the slight bronze on her cheek told me she had not known a winter in these islands.

"I certainly hadn't expected you," I said. Her presence here disturbed me.

"I came about half an hour ago. I didn't know, Jack, it was in a bare, rough cottage like this that you lived."

"I beg of you not to comment on me and my affairs. I am very well content."

"But I must. It distresses me. You don't mean to say you've lived here all the time."

"All the time."

"But——"

"Please!" I protested; and then, as I felt that something more definite needed to be said, I added: "We were very happy here."

She winced a little, and turned away. "You are very obstinate," she said.

I did not know in what connection this was meant; moreover, I felt exceedingly awkward; and so I made no effort to break a silence that grew painful.

"I didn't come out of mere curiosity," she said with a sharp touch of indignation.

"I never suggested that you had. But why did you come?"

"Do you forget, Jack, that you are my husband?"

I looked at her wide-eyed in astonishment. Her words

utterly bewildered me. I failed at first completely to take their meaning, they seemed spoken from so different a clime. It was not for a long time that I realised she was alluding to a legal bond that, seemingly, still existed between us.

"Are you—that is to say, are you speaking legally?"

"I don't think you are right in making a joke of it."

"Oh, believe me, nothing is further from my thought. But you are speaking of a thing—well, a long time ago I believe I said something about its irrelevance. It is more so now."

"It isn't for me. It exists for me."

"Without any desire to be merely unkind, may I remind you that you said you felt it was your duty——"

"Don't, Jack! That was a stupid thing I said, and I am very sorry for it. I really meant to avoid saying how much more it meant to me. It was priggishly said, but it really only meant the covering of awkwardness. I am awkward now."

"So am I. You should not have come."

"I had to. I heard through Mr. Ramsay that she had died. That was a year ago. I thought I would let another year go by, and then come to see you and try if our unhappy difference could not be settled, and our life taken up again. I would be willing to do without a social life. It is not so satisfactory as one thinks."

I felt infinitely sorry for her, for she was deeply moved and profoundly in earnest. But what could I do? She was asking for a thing that could not be given, and she was not at all aware how wide and unbridgable a space had stretched between us.

"You should not have come. You should not have come," I said. "You don't realise the position of affairs—what eternities have rolled on. When I came to you some years ago, and asked you to liberate me, if you had freely thrown open the door, you would have put me in a most difficult position. I loved her with all my heart, but there were some parts in me all the time secretly testifying to links between us, between you and me. They were in submission at the time, but I cannot say what they would have done if you had appealed to them and offered at the same time to cut all statutory shackles. I have often thought of that since. From one point of view, it was my danger. But you did not take that

course. You held me by my bonds, you made your appeal to the State, to something that was not between us ; and you clean cut the links remaining between us. Months of bitterness followed that made the thought of you—painful to me. Then she came ; asking nothing, and bringing nothing, yet receiving and bringing untellable riches. Our life was a perfect marriage. I thank God humbly that there never was so much as a difference or shadow between us, though we lived in the confined elbow-space of this one room day and night for many weeks continuously of wild weather that she dared not encounter. That absolved everything else. And it was you who decreed that order of things."

There was a long, painful silence between before she spoke.

" But she is dead," she then said gently.

" No, no, no ! " I cried.

She looked at me surprisedly. I got up and went out of the cottage.

" Will you come out here ? " I said. She came. " What do you see there ? " I asked her.

" The hillside ? "

" If I suggested to you that it was no mere tangible matter, but a splendid Being, what would you say ? "

" I don't know."

" If I told you it was but the materialising of the thought-power of a god, whose appearance it was, what would you say ? "

" It's a strange, imaginative idea, Jack."

" If I told you that man's imagination was an authentic sense giving him a dimly shaped knowledge of the world of which all this show, these hills, this valley, these fair plains and distances, was but a shadowy facet, which was above it, and through it, and round it, in which our spirits may have play even while we take a temporary nucleus in a body and a brain, where Time is absolved and Space itself is scarcely more than a trick, where separate beauties merge into an exquisite essence, where music is a continual bubbling from unseen depths, where spiritual movement is power making intellectual and physical movement an almost inconceivable lethargy, where Being may have an abundant urgency, and where it is even possible from this partial appearance to transmit one's

energies in an ecstasy of delight, in a splendour of eternal achievement: what then? You would think me mad?"

"I think these are dangerous things to play with."

"Well, on that hillside somewhere, she is buried. I don't know where now. I don't care: the heather is over it, and the earth will soon be one with it. But in the real and veritable world, that is so much inside this world that it can see its very electrons as stars, that is so much outside it that it can see the whole of it as a speck of dust, she has her splendid existence, and there I am slowly learning to have my existence too, under the knowledge, the eye, if I may say so, of the Uncreated Beauty Himself, whom we would serve, for without Him we could not be. I may have its fashion wrong, but it is something in that semblance. The Earth-presences are there; the Earth herself is there; and she and I are there. They, I think, are, in some degree, static; we all are progressive and urgent. Forgive me, I weary you."

"No, you don't. But why do you tell me all this?"

I did not wish to hurt her. I looked at her, and asked her:

"What was it you came here to ask me to do?"

We looked at one another, with a resolving issue between us.

"I am sorry," I said, "but you see what things have rolled between us. We must each go on; we cannot go back."

"But what if all this is merely imagination?"

"Nothing can be *merely* imagination. I know. And I know the more clearly because she is there to help me. In fact, that is the present case. That is why the very bond to which you have referred makes the distance between us the more impassable."

In the silver light of a cloudy afternoon, before my cottage on the hillside, we stood so before each other. The silence between us no longer seemed one of covert antagonism. A gentler influence seemed to smooth that away, and I felt glad she had come.

Presently with a dignified delicacy she put out her hand. "Good-bye then," she said.

"Let me make you a cup of tea before you go."

"It would be better not. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

I watched the car down the road. When it disappeared

behind the hummock below I waited till it reappeared the other side of the village. She waved to me there, and I waved back. But I stood watching it as it wound down the road, until it disappeared, a mere speck, round the bend of the valley. Then I turned into my cottage, and a great sweetness of thought filled my mind. I was glad she had come. It seemed to set things straight. And there was a new note in the music sweeping over the hill.

That July, Tim Larkin and James Ramsay came together to stay with me. They stayed nearly a month. The weather was good, and we slept out beneath the stars. They often went out together, leaving me alone—choosing to do so with a quick refinement of sympathy that told me at once how far we all had progressed. And, indeed, their visits left me inexpressibly enriched, ours had been so true and full a companionship.

Often these days I had been haunted by just that curious sense of richness, that fulness of things, that ripeness of Time, that has left me wondering what was to follow. I have lived a full life, with much of diversity in it, and much of adversity too ; much of strangeness and seeming unexpectedness ; much of struggle, of thwarting and misconception ; with much also of joy, and a great harvest of fulfilment. I commend it all ; and find it all good. Even my stupidities, egotisms and grossnesses, have been turned to good. Life has been good. I would not have had it otherwise.

Yet that is too retrospective. The best is always forward, not backward ; and one must continue to live, earnestly, and with all one's heart. There is a great richness ahead ; and I shall set out to explore it and possess it and pass it into currency.

XVI

AFTERWORD BY JAMES RAMSAY

Elthorne's charge to me, when handing me the manuscript of this book, was to revise it, delete where necessary, and generally so to adjust it that it would more readily assume the shape he feared it lacked. His words to me during the last days, when his telegram had summoned me to him, were : " There are moments when I doubt the least atom of its value ; there are moments when it fascinates my reflection ; and in neither mood can I get a discovery of its proportions. In the first flush of recalling the past I let myself loose in reminiscence ; and I have since wondered what link there is between much of what I have said of those early days and what was to follow thereafter ; but when I tried to cut it down, or prune it even, the whole of the future seemed rooted there, which would be maimed and left without implication by such excision. If this sequence, this growth, is patent or not, I can't say. My eyes have grown tired with looking at the thing. As grand old Carlyle said, you know : ' A man must have done with a thing ! ' God help it ! you take it, and do what you think. I'm pushing off my skiff now, and I'm wondering if it will concern me much where I go. Perhaps it will concern me infinitely : so take care ! "

It is easy for a man to give such a charge to his fellow. It is another thing for his fellow to complete it. Larkin and I have come to the decision to let the book be published as it came into our hands. Whoever might have altered it, we could not have done so, for we loved the man, and treasure every memory of him. He was staunch and faithful to a fault. Even as he claved without flinching to what he justly held to be his purpose in life, so he held firmly to his friends. If an outsider may make the comment, one of the main causes why his disagreement with Mrs. Elthorne at once became so acute was because of the breach of loyalty that it meant. It was so in the higher sense, for, as he was in the habit of saying : " I don't always admit the brotherhood of Man : I admit the brotherhood of all those who serve Beauty : that is the only brotherhood ; there are no other bonds ; against all others we wage an implacable warfare, a sword in one hand and a

banner in the other." That was his supreme loyalty, and I have never known him fail from it. But in the lower loyalty, the loyalty to friends, he never flinched, and, whatever temporary disagreement might have been afoot, he never failed to respond when his friends turned to him. He was our leader, our leader among equals ; but he was our friend who rejoiced to have the command of friendship put upon him. I have heard him called a churl, because, presumably, he held no truck with those who turned aside from purposeful living ; but no churl ever responded to the appeals of humanity as he did. It was scarcely even the response of volition : especially latterly it became the response of a reflex. Similarly I have heard him called a pedant. That used most to puzzle Larkin and myself. For his humanity was as laughterful as it was purposeful.

This brings me to the most curious defect I discover in this book. When Elthorne bent his mind to a thing he became tense, even titanic, and he took on him a gusto that turned his labour into a kind of great play ; but the nature of the play itself was rather too strenuous in an effete day for others to notice the joy in it. It seemed dark, deep-grained, knotted ; in its different way like the laughter of drums in his favourite Ninth Symphony. That was the aspect it wore in his work, often enough in himself ; and I think it a great pity that, in this book, one would scarcely ever divine the man who, in his deepest despair, would set out with as many pranks, and as ridiculous and as childlike, as an effervescent schoolboy let loose on a half-term holiday. They were of a nature that would not bear relation, they depended so on the seeming shallow gaiety of the moment. With Larkin and myself he was often like a boy trying to make his stiff-legged elders run, and his stiff-legged elders were only too self-conscious while he seemed to glory in the disapprobation he attracted.

It was so in the early days of struggle in London, when he flung away trouble like a cloak, and compelled us to run races up the road, with some far pedestrian as a winning-post, who was much puzzled at the excitement he seemed to create and cry a halt to. It was so on the hills of Mayo, where, however, the races he ran and the great echoing laughter seemed to spring from a far more significant spontaneity. I

can see the origin of this in the slight account he gives in these pages of his father. Indeed, it is clear to me that he derived much from his father, in temperament and likeness; though such derivations very truly are an impertinent ingenuity as a rule.

Save for some hints, this side of him does not appear in the book, and both Larkin and myself noticed the defect at once. The curious thing is that its idiom is a perfect imprint of his personality notwithstanding that deficiency. His sensitiveness (that early brought him much misunderstanding), his intensity and consequent scorn of indirect methods (that to the end created for him an atmosphere of active dislike), his energy and pace of life and thought (that puzzled people and so caused them to distrust him)—all these things are here. One curious trait I noticed about him was the way in which he lived in and for his great moments. There are players in sports, I notice, who need a great occasion to call out their powers. It was so with Elthorne in his life. In reviewing, if he thought a book a little book he would praise it or blame it indifferently. I could not understand the seeming vagary of some of his opinions until I taxed him with it. "One might just as well speak kindly," he answered; "who'll hear of it in a year's time? It doesn't matter." In the same way I could not get him interested in writers who did not intend ambitiously. He would read for a space, then his attention would wander, and he would turn to some work of his own or go out. But if the work intended greatly (as he would say), if there was matter in it of moment to his "soulthrift," his eye would kindle, and he would be content to overlook faults innumerable in its technique. It was he who overcame my dislike for Blake. "Read him, man," he said; "read him; he matters: nearly everything that's going to matter in future days lies implicit in Blake." I lent him the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. "Blake," he cried; "Blake. You'll find all this there." And for some days hereafter he carried about with him an old valuable copy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. This is now in my possession. So I remember in his early days (after a conversation that is recorded in these pages a great deal more to his disfavour than happened in the event, such was his habit of magnifying the *gaucheries* his sensitiveness

invented) seeing him steadfastly go through the *Comédie Humaine* volume by volume in an English translation.

His criticism of me was that I was more interested in the text of books than in the things whereof they treated. My criticism of him was that he lost sight of the value of the little perfections in a disproportionate lust for the inspirations from which great impulsions come. "Rectangular perfections!" he would cry. "We want curves, man; we want curves, and chance them making an ellipsis rather than a circle." It was one of the most pregnant of his many sayings. It bears much thinking upon. He himself illustrated it fully, for he was an ellipsis, in his way of thinking, in his strenuous living, even in the faulty grammar or daring construction of his sentences. But he was an ellipsis that grew to be more of a circle for every month he lived, in all he wrought and did; and that, as we would both have agreed, is the best justification of a man's life.

Even as this happened his impatience grew less and his scorn diminished. When I showed him a letter in which he wrote of the "pigmy critics and pigmy pavement-shufflers who make up the reading public," he laughed and said: "It's true enough, old Ramsay; but what an unnecessary thing to have said!" However, he was never really intolerant. It was never just a whimsey idea of his that personalities develop at tangents. He was forceful; but he rejoiced in forcefulness opposing him. And one of the things that puzzled him most was when people carried violent disagreements into personal relations. I knew him well, but this trait in him always puzzled me. He would call a man a liar and a rogue in some specific disagreement, and then, when the specific cause of disagreement was put by, expect to walk down the road with him in completest friendliness. "Why ever not?" he said once to a man, in utter astonishment at finding unfriendliness. "I say you're an idiot, and I think you are; but we can't all be wise, so why not let's have a drink?" This bewildering forthrightness of his continued to bewilder us all to the very last.

One thing he never lost, and that was a long memory. A dropped friendship, for instance, was never taken up again. Some called this a shortness of memory, when it was the very reverse. The old intimacy was never really forgotten, it

seemed queerly to live on in the man, and anything else than it was intolerable. And in his closing years another instance of this arose. He had sent his first book to a leading house of publishers, who had, in their usual way, rejected it. Towards the end this same house wrote to him suggesting a collected edition. Both Larkin and myself were in Mayo when this letter arrived, and we advised him strongly to accept it. "It's just a piratical suggestion—when others have done all the work and taken all the risk. The old boys there would be surprised that I think them libertines; but that's what they are, and every bit as lax in decency and morality. No, I'll not reply to them at all." The offer was an excellent one, and we urged him to close with it, but he just laughed at us in some such words as these.

Yet I know the idea had touched him nearly, and Larkin and myself succeeded in getting a similar proposal (in worse terms) put up by another, newer publisher. This he closed with, and, as I conjecture, spent the time between the writing of this book and his death in preparing the edition. The first three volumes were to be published together, but he was destined not to see them. They were due for October, he died in September. From wherever he viewed the scene he must have had a detached pleasure in what followed. The coincidence of his death and the publication of the edition made him the twelvemonths' vogue he suddenly became. The very critics who decried him when he was alive made money out of magazine articles on him when he was dead. Larkin said he could imagine him standing watching the spectacle with the scornful light in his eyes and the characteristic flicker and movement of his lips when cynically amused, and saying: "It's not me they're concerned with at all, do you know, but only the fine articles I've given them the chance of writing. They'll blow me up now, and let me go flat after, equally unconcernedly. And, mind you, if the State had helped me before, it could have taken all the profit of this now."

It was in the middle of that September that I received a telegram from him bidding me go to him at once. The telegram also said that he had wired to Larkin. I knew by that that something was amiss, and went forthwith down to the city to see Larkin. It was not easy for him to get away, and we decided that I should go alone, and let him know later what

to do. When I arrived in Mayo it was to find Elthorne very ill indeed.

"It's the finish, old Ramsay," he said to me.

"Nonsense," I told him, for indeed, though he looked ill, one did not associate death with that tenacious personality.

"You must not talk like that, Jack."

"I know what you mean," he said, "but this is not relinquishing, this is knowledge. I have the knowledge in me: Guala intimates it, Ethna intimates it: I know it like I can guess your thoughts now, as cattle can snuff a storm. And I am very well content."

I had never gone altogether with him in his retirement (as he disliked my calling it), and I failed altogether to keep pace with him where he went treading among the mysteries. I knew he must be right: anything that could so beautify his character, his carriage, his thoughts, his very facial expression, must be true—or else there is no truth. His phrase was: "Beauty is a state, Truth is a deed, and Truth is Beauty coming into action": with which I concur, and by which I was compelled to believe him even when I least could see clearly what he meant. And now, as he spoke, there was something in his voice that drove protest and complaint out of me, and made the duty before us like the setting of a house in order. As I looked on him I smiled, for there came to me the understanding of an old phrase: "He speaks as a man having authority, and not as a scribe."

When I went down into the village to wire to Larkin and to Mr. Frank Elthorne I learnt, what I could not discover from him, how he had fallen ill. It was very good to a friend's heart to hear the way the people spoke of dear old Elthorne.

"He's a grand man, surely," I was told; "and it'll be a bad day for this place if anything happened to him, so it will. You see, sir, this is the way it was. The rough weather came on the top of us before we knew how we were in it at all. Well, sir, God help us, we're a simple people anyhow, and we were destroyed, thinking our bit of corn would be ruined on us altogether lying in the fields the way it was. Patch Gallagher, and he having the biggest bit of land in this valley, called a *meitheal*; but what was the use of that when we were all troubled with our own stuff? Well, sir, that was the time Mr. Elthorne came to our help. He put us all together in our

companies ; and we began to work together in our companies, working along where the corn was most easily to be got. Then we went over the whole place with Father Hefferan and took an account of the corn every man had to be gathered—each man's in its proper proportion. He did that, sir ; he was a fair man, Mr. Elthorne was, a wonderful fair man, and there isn't a man who could gainsay that. That was the way it was, sir—we worked from the dawn of day to the down of day, and the first man to come out was Mr. Elthorne and the last man to go in was Mr. Elthorne. Always smiling he was, though it was clear as the sun do rise he was terribly tired. And he had good reason to be, I'll say that, sir. He worked quicker than any of us, he did so, for that was the way he made us work quicker. Wet through he was, all times, eating no more than the potatoes that came to us. And he wouldn't be put from it, though Father Hefferan tried well enough like the good man he is. No, he wouldn't be put from it. He thought—I'll speak Mr. Elthorne fair, sir : what way wouldn't I, and he the noble man he was ? That's true, he was a noble man. But he was an obstinate man, a very obstinate sort of a man, and he would believe that what any other man in the world could do, himself could do. We're a simple people, sir, we're always in the clothes that do be wet, and a plate of spuds and a dish of tea, or a bit of whiskey itself some odd time, from the morning rise till the sun does fall, is our custom. Mr. Elthorne wasn't nurtured that way at all ; but he was working for us, and it's not for me to say a thing against him. So we went on working till the corn was that sodden it wasn't worth the lifting. We left it then. All that day, and the day before it, Mr. Elthorne had been like a horse you wouldn't whip for shame ; but he wouldn't stop then. He brought us all to Father Hefferan, and there he was, giving every man a piece of paper he signed with his own hand for the corn he'd a right to have, and he'd have fallen like any tree you would cut if Father hadn't caught him. That was a week ago this very day, sir. There isn't a house in this village that doesn't owe its weight of gold to Mr. Elthorne. He's a grand man ; and I was telling Father, he's a holy man too. And that's the truth."

"He would believe that what any other man in the world could do, himself could do." Michael Barrett struck his finger

on a characteristic obstinacy of Elthorne's there. And the result was that he could breathe only with the utmost difficulty, with a frame so sorely reduced in vitality as to be incompetent of re-asserting its strength. But his mind was clear ; and though he could speak but little, we had some slight and fragmentary conversations that helped me to a better understanding of his attitude than I had ever found before.

I had been reading the closing pages of this book of his, and had been wonderfully illumined while yet bewildered and baffled by them. I asked him what they meant.

" Do you mean that visible things are only symbols ? "

" What is a symbol ? " he asked ; and then after a while said slowly : " Let's drop words we don't quite understand. I mean a partial appearance of a thing that is much more at the same time : the fourth dimension appearing to the third dimension necessarily in terms of the third—just as the third would to the second. You work it out in models."

" Do you mean to claim absolute truth for your vision ? "

" Silly old Ramsay ! Why do you think I write books ? For a joke ? None of your pranks."

" Not just as you see it, though, surely ! "

" You're in dotage, old white-beard ! I don't claim the north side as the only true Westminster Abbey because you prefer the south side. But it's Westminster Abbey all the time."

" Do I bother you ? "

" Heaps ! But I can bear it ! "

" What I mean is, your words seem queerly precise and yet queerly vague. I know all about vision being vision, but couldn't you give more clues ? "

" Impossible. Two men draw the old Abbey, north and south. They draw on paper—in second dimension consequently. They trick up conventions of perspective, and so on, to suggest third, but 'tis really only second. So they differ about the same thing. They can only be imperfect, partial, suggestive. I use words—invention of the third dimension. I can only be imperfect, partial, suggestive. But the thing's there all the time—to be experienced. Poetry's soaked with the experience. So is religion at its best—when it's true, I should say. That's why sounds and colours mean more than words. Every chord suggests chords up and down the scale

that don't come to our ears, but which we know all about all the same. Suggestion is significance."

Another time he said to me very earnestly, without my having put any question at all to him: "Ramsay, dear man, there's nothing inanimate anywhere. Old Earth's a big, beautiful being who knows all about each of us. The clay of her, the rocks of her, are her energies passing before our sight. You see them in seeming-solid on the floor. You see them liker their bright vivid selves in the radiations that strike against a plate of sulphide of zinc—you know what I mean. It's all real, or it's all unreal, however you like to look at it; but it's never inanimate. I tell you, there's nothing inanimate. The things that seem inanimate here are the faulty reports of our senses of tremendous powers and presences in the Beyond that's about us—as any physicist will show you in two minutes in his laboratory. Everything is a demonstration of life, sentience and knowledge, such as we can scarcely apprehend. We know that when we see at the angles of vision, or, best of all, in the tremendous communion of Love. Love commands all knowledge: Love is knowledge. Love helps one to the Uncreated Beauty Himself. Christ's love did that, do you know. And just as our dear old Earth's energies show themselves in crystals, and flowers, and songs of birds, so the energy of Love shows itself in beautiful expressions of face, beautiful gestures, beautiful songs, beauty everywhere. That's why we love Beauty, because Love is the energising of Beauty. Ramsay, old man, how we waste our days! I'd like to live again, in some ways; but we must go onward—and it's grand to go onward."

On the Friday Larkin arrived, with Frank Elthorne: indeed it was, I learnt, chiefly owing to Frank Elthorne's influence with his cousin that Larkin was able to get away. Our friend by then was in a bad way, breathing with difficulty and very weak. He never lost humour, however, and greeted his brother and Larkin happily.

"Good old Tim," he said, putting out his hand to them. "Hullo, Frank! There's all about you in a book over there. You're not quite so bad as that. But you're an animal, though. Feeds well, don't he, Ramsay?"

Poor Frank Elthorne! He was the most deeply distressed of us all. I have not often seen a man so grieved. Except

for his distress, that evening would have been almost a happy reunion. It was our last, for the following afternoon Elthorne became delirious. That made his brother's distress so terrible that our concern once or twice was with him. Then he sat for hours moodily watching his brother ; and " Poor old Jack ! Poor dear Jack ! Can't anything be done ? " he would say, and wildly walk about the end of the cottage. Perhaps this was partly owing to what seemed to him the strangeness of Elthorne's words. To me, knowing the attitude of his spirit, they were significant and interesting, and too far beyond the bounds of common meanings to be reproduced. Larkin interested me most. He seemed almost transformed. He stood nearly the whole of that Sunday at the foot of the bed, watching Elthorne with bright, widely-opened eyes and a soft smile that gave his face the strange light as of a flower. The people of Mayo doubtless would have called him " away " ; but that there was another Larkin who knew what was happening than the customary Larkin of the city of London was only too clear. He was transfigured and illumined.

On the Monday afternoon Elthorne became so weak that all motion failed him, and the cottage was wrapt in a great hush. The doctor was there the whole time ; but the first we knew of his death was that Larkin suddenly relaxed his attitude, breathed heavily, and straightway walked out of the cottage. It was startling. It was just as if he had gone out to follow his friend. I knew forthwith what it meant, and turned at once to the doctor, who confirmed my thought. Then I was alarmed by hearing a very distressing abandonment of tears from Frank Elthorne, whom I had forgotten where he sat in his corner.

The dusk was creeping through the valley, when I heard the voices of women keening as they came up the hill. They had somehow learnt the news : probably from Larkin. Soon they came up about the cottage, and into the cottage, keening wildly, and with a poignancy of sorrow that needed no simulation. It was a strange, wild scene. All the village must have been there, keening passionately in the low dusk that was setting on the hills.

There was a similar scene when, a few days later, we buried him beside the mate of his last years. Martin O'Hara found the place at once, and without hesitation, though it had resumed

its oneness with the hillside. Frank Elthorne was almost terrified by the figures that knelt and, with richly coloured shawls over their heads, keened on and on in their abandonment of sorrow. As we returned down the hill he said to me : " I never understood him, Ramsay ; and I must say I don't think he ever really understood me. But I loved him, God knows ; and I am sure he loved me very much. I wish we could live our lives again. He was a very great man, my brother was."

The following day we returned to England. As the train toiled slowly onward, and we sat in silence, I caught Larkin's glance, and said to him, as he smiled across at me :

" You know one of the last things he said to me before you came ?—' But we must go onward—you know, it's grand to go onward.' "

" Just like him, I may say," said Larkin.

THE END

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